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ABSTRACT

This document is a sourcebook of ideas and materials for adult basic education teachers and others who want to design programming allowing women who have experienced the impact of violence to learn successfully. The sourcebook consists of three chapters that all contain an introduction, tools for programs, and examples from programs. The topics examined in the three chapters are as follows: (1) taking on the challenge of helping women who have felt the impacts of violence (reasons for addressing violence; exploring the complexities of violence; recognizing violence's impacts on learning); (2) building a web of support for learners who have been impacted by violence (building program support; building community support; practicing self-care); and (3) reforming programming (acknowledging violence; creating conditions for learning; changing the curriculum). The following resource materials are included: (1) the article "But I'm Not a Therapist: The Challenge of Creating Effective Literacy Learning for Survivors of Trauma" (Jenny Horsman, Sue Shore); (2) a step-by-step description of the collage process; (3) materials about and from a playwriting project in a native language literacy group; (4) examples of poems used by programs; (5) sample materials on violence in public space; and (5) bibliographies listing a total of 121 references. The reference lists in Chapters 1 through 3 contain a total of 15 references. (MN)

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Take on the Challenge

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"A Cautionary Tale or Aren't you glad that you know Wen-Do?" From the album *The Fishing Is Free* by Jane Field. Hedgehog Songs. (Jane Field, 39 Parliament St., #514 Toronto, Ontario M5A 4R2. E-mail: jane.and.hil@sympatco.ca.)

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For all the adult basic
education students, teachers,
administrators, and staff who
face the issues of the impact
of violence on learning daily
and continue to work for
social change and equality.

From left to right, back to front: *Tammy Stockman, Katy Chaffee, (behind) Janet Smith, Janice Armstrong, Kimberly McCaughey, Nancy Fritz, Gloria Caprio, Margie Parsons, Michele Rajotte, Caye Caplan, Char Caver, Bernice Morris, Maria Salgado, Elizabeth Morrish, Anna Yangco, Ruthie Ackerman, Jenny Horsman*

Not Shown: *Judy Hofer, Leslie Ridgway*

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Preface

What is the Source Book and who is it for?

We called this a "Source Book" because we hope that it will be a source of inspiration, a source of information, and a source for reflection. It is a collection of ideas and activities addressing the impact of violence on women's learning in adult basic education. (Basic literacy, GED, job readiness, English to Speakers of Other Languages ESOL classes in all settings, etc.) The book is primarily for teachers, but will be useful for people in all roles and in all types of adult basic education programs. We want it to become a source of strength to take on the challenging and exciting work of designing programming where women can learn successfully.

The Source Book contains the learning from the Women, Violence, and Adult Education (WVAE) project, a three-year project where teachers from six adult basic education programs in New England all changed practices in their programs and classrooms to address the impact of violence on learning. The project was funded by the Women's Educational Equity Act program under the U.S. Department of Education and was coordinated by World Education, a nonprofit organization based in Boston, Massachusetts.

Some of the participants at the introductory institute

What programs were involved and what did they do?

The project began with a three-day introductory institute in April 2000. Adult education practitioners gathered from across New England to explore issues of violence and oppression. Programs then applied to become part of the project. Six programs were chosen. World Education was looking for a diverse group of participants and programs. Whenever possible at least two educators participated from each program. Following are the six programs and the program staff that participated. The staff were all teachers, and, as is often the case in adult basic education, sometimes juggled several roles at the same time, including administrator, program coordinator, tutor, case manager, counselor, social worker, job coach, VISTA volunteer.

Getting Ready to Work, Vermont Adult Learning
Katy Chaffee and Tammy Stockman
A welfare-to-work program in White River Junction.

Even Start LINKS, Franklin County Adult Basic Education
Janice Armstrong and Janet Smith
A family literacy program in rural Maine that works with families in their homes.

York School, York Correctional Institution
Kim McCaughey and Leslie Ridgway
Adult education school in a women's maximum-security prison in Connecticut.

The Genesis Center
Gloria Caprio, Nancy Fritz, Bernice Morris, and Michele Rajotte
A program for immigrants and refugees with ESOL classes in Providence, Rhode Island.

The Community Education Project (CEP)
Maria Salgado
A community-based organization that offers Native Language Literacy and basic education classes in Holyoke, Massachusetts.

The Adult Learners Program, Project Hope
Char Caver and Anna Yangco
A literacy and GED program located in a homeless shelter for women in Dorchester, Massachusetts.

Teachers from these programs participated in a series of four two-day trainings held over the course of two years to share ideas, discuss research, and create a supportive community of educators. Programs carried out a variety of activities as part of the project and integrated new thinking about how to address the impact of violence on learning within their programs. All the program workers made diverse connections in their communities to find organizational supports for the work. They also developed innovative groups for women learners to explore possibilities for enhancing learning. The participants discovered ways to break silences about issues of violence and learning that were appropriate to their unique program settings.

In this manual we have woven voices of participants into the text, and at the end of each chapter there is a section which includes the women's own writing about their work in their programs. We did not order the programs alphabetically, but chose the order for the flow of content and context.

Who are "we" and what brought us to this work?

The authors are Elizabeth Morrish, Jenny Horsman, and Judy Hofer — the training team on the project, the editors of the participant interviews and writing used, and the writers of the unnamed portions in this book. We came together because of our similar interests working as adult educators recognizing the impact of violence on the lives of women. Elizabeth works with World Education on literacy and health projects, and had created a book with her students, *Question Violence — Love is the Answer* (1994), about violence in the lives of young mothers. She is the director of the WVAE project. Jenny works as a community educator and researcher; her research was the foundation of the project. She had written *Something in my Mind Besides the Everyday* (1990) and *Too Scared to Learn: Women, Violence and Education* (2000). Judy works on research and professional development, and co-authored a study on professional development in adult basic education under the National Center for the Study of Adult Literacy and Learning (NCSALL). She also made a video and guide, *Together We Bloom* (1998), with her students about the support group they formed around issues of violence in their lives. The Women, Violence, and Adult Education project built on those experiences. The three years working with the participants in this project has pushed all of our thinking and deepened our analysis of the complexity of violence and its impact on learning.

How is the Source Book organized?

There are three chapters. Each chapter has three sections: a general introduction to the issue, tools for programs that include questions and activities for reflection, and examples from the WVAE programs illustrating the activities they developed and changes they made.

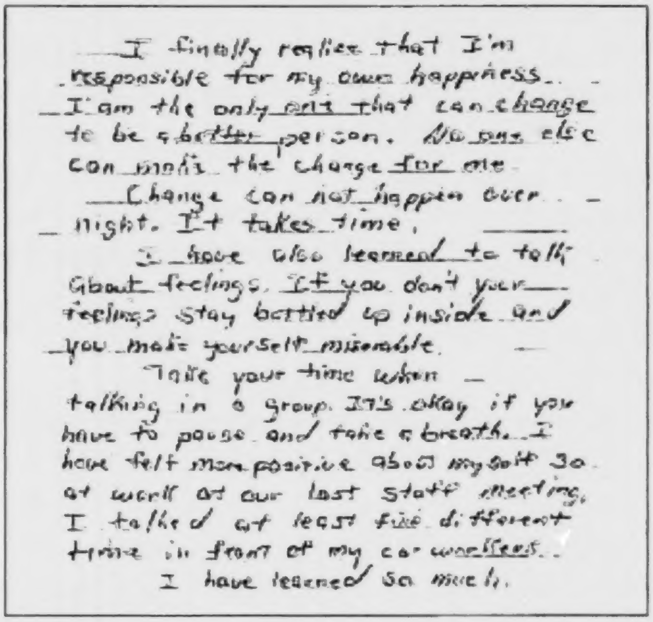
Chapter One — Take on the Challenge explores our understanding of violence and its impacts on learning, and first steps that programs can take.

Chapter Two — Build a Web of Support describes how establishing program and community support and taking care of yourself are key to doing this work.

Chapter Three — Reform Programming examines possibilities for changing curriculum and creating conditions for learning; it includes detailed descriptions from each program on women's groups they formed with students.

The hard work of teachers and students in the six programs is the source for this Source Book. We hope that our experiences will speak to you and encourage you in your work to address the impact of violence on learning, and to strengthen your program to support learning for all women.

In the last year of the project, lessons learned from the six original programs were shared with new programs through a series of workshops. The facilitators at these workshops were three teachers from the orginal programs: Char Caver, Leslie Ridgway, and Tammy Stockman. The new programs then implemented changes in their programming based on what the learned from the original programs' experiences. A student from one of the new programs wrote:



I finally realize that I'm
responsible for my own happiness.
I am the only one that can change
to be a better person. No one else
can make the change for me.
Change can not happen over-
night. It takes time.
I have also learned to talk
about feelings. If you don't your
feelings stay bottled up inside and
you make yourself miserable.
Take your time when
talking in a group. It's okay if you
have to pause and take a breath. I
have felt more positive about myself so
at work at our last staff meeting,
I talked at least five different
time in front of my co-workers.
I have learned so much.

This student's reflections is just one example of the many positive outcomes.

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Chapter One

Take on the Challenge

Introduction
    Why Take on the Challenge
    Crossing the Line
    Understanding Violence
    References

Tools for Programs: Reflect and Take Action
    Taking First Steps

Examples from Programs
    Program Descriptions
    Their First Steps

Introduction

Taking on the challenge of recognizing and addressing issues of violence in our society, in our lives, and in our classrooms is essential to support learning. When programs took this on these were the positive results:

- students could more readily imagine new possibilities for themselves;
- in spite of setbacks students held on to their dreams and persisted in taking steps to create positive changes in their lives;
- students felt they had worth and from that place were better able to learn;
- teachers felt renewed energy for their work;
- students were more able to identify their strengths, which lead to them making appropriate and meaningful career choices;
- students did not leave their program without telling anyone why they were leaving;
- teachers no longer felt powerless in the face of a demand they "fix it" when they heard stories of violence;
- students worked together to learn more successfully;
- staff worked together to draw more effectively on resources in the agency and community.

Although we have seen the positive effects of taking on this work, it still lies outside our usual expectations of adult basic education. Therefore, we start our Source Book with a look at why to take on this challenge, how to address the concerns people have about opening up this issue, and learning more about violence and its impact on learning.

Jenny Horsman and Char Caver

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Why Take on the Challenge

Different people will take on this work for different reasons. Here is how some of the Women, Violence, and Adult Education (WVAE) project participants talked about their reasons for joining the project and taking on the challenge.

For Anna Yangco, working in a homeless shelter in Boston, and for other teachers, it was the death of a student or someone connected to the adult education community that brought them to the work.

> *In February 2000, one of my students was killed by her son. As a writing teacher, I get to look at people's innermost thoughts. I thought I knew this woman. But she used religion to mask her problem. She would say, "It's in the hands of God." Still, I felt I should have known. In the fall she used to write a lot, but after Christmas break she would hardly write at all. I would ask her, "Why aren't you writing anymore?" And she would say, "Oh, I don't know. I just can't do it anymore." Then, when she died, I was so upset. I kept thinking, "What could I have done?" I started wondering what I could do to prevent this from happening again. Then, in March, my boss got a flier about the Women and Violence project. My boss told me I should get involved in it. It was perfect timing. So I went to the first institute, and [my colleague] Char and I have been involved ever since.* **(Anna)**

Maria Salgado, who works at a community-based organization in western Massachusetts, said,

> *Violence is a disease.... Violence is so rampant in our community, people have become desensitized.... The women in my community are very poor and virtually all of them experience violence.... Several tragedies occurred in the community that impacted the women in the group. [At the adult learning center] one woman's 14-year-old son committed suicide. And then there was a series of gang-related murders.* **(Maria)**

Leslie Ridgway, a social worker in a maximum security women's prison in Connecticut, co-wrote an article with Dale Griffith about how as the conditions in the women's prison where she works got harsher, the "women reached the limit of their coping skills." There was a rash of suicide attempts and two women died.

> In the past, Niantic's prison has served as a model for other women's institutions across the country interested in treatment leading to rehabilitation. Since the mid-1990s, however, the political tide has turned. In Connecticut, tougher views on the treatment of convicts have resulted in longer sentences and fewer treatment programs. Custody has become the primary concern, and new staff trainees follow a rigid military model, creating an "us versus them" mentality. Most women are not incarcerated for violent crimes, and while the prison has always had its share of disruptive inmates, most residents are compliant. Still, under the new system, all York Correctional Institute (YCI) inmates receive harsh treatment and few privileges, even when their behavior is exemplary.

> Within this climate, the inmates of YCI suffer more humiliation than under the old system. This often awakens old traumas. For example, inmates were once called by their given rather than their last names; now, they are referred to solely by last name. This may seem like a small change, but it symbolizes the increased distance of the present order. In a prison, the staff's authority cannot be questioned, so residents often bury feelings. Some inmates explode by harming others or themselves. Mental health services, overcrowded and understaffed, provide little help; women dislike being sent there.
>
> Learning became difficult. Many women reached the limit of their coping skills. At the school, educational staff worried about the women's mental and physical health and discussed ways to help them cope. A safe port in the emotional storm was needed. (Ridgway 2002:11-14)

Janice Armstrong, the coordinator of a family literacy program in rural Maine, talked about the isolation in that community and why she wanted to join the WVAE project:

> *The biggest problems around here seem to be related to the isolation people experience.... For many women, the isolation leads to low self-esteem. They can't visualize what's possible. They just accept the status quo.... In many cases [the status quo is] getting beat up or watching your children be abused.... I've seen lots of violence and I was eager to participate in this project because I wanted to do more than I was doing. I used to work to get women services, and I would try to open their world a little so they could see other possibilities. I still think these approaches are necessary. But I was working in a much more reactive context back then. I would deal with violence as it came up, but I never thought about addressing it at an agency-wide level. This project gave me a chance to do that.* **(Janice)**

Once Janice openly took on issues of violence, people started looking at ways to change many areas of the agency to support a respectful, safe learning environment.

> *For example, last year a man called the learning center. He wanted to talk to a student. It turned out that the student didn't want to talk to him. I think she may have even had a restraining order out on him. This incident opened up a conversation about violence and learning, a conversation about what constitutes safety. We saw this isolated incident as part of the bigger issue of feeling safe. Did we want to make our agency a safe place? If so, we asked ourselves, what can we do? This conversation is still in progress. We've talked about strategies for handling calls from strangers. We've decided that it's best to consult the person before the call is put through. This also creates a safe environment for the staff, because the students aren't the only ones dealing with issues of violence. We've also started a conversation about how to deal with angry people who might come into the agency. How do you diffuse anger? Do we have strategies in place? Are we looking at issues related to violence in the agency? If not, why not? The response has been very gradual.* **(Janice)**

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Many of the teachers began addressing issues of violence because of their political and/or religious beliefs. Michele Rajotte, who works with ESOL (English to Speakers of Other Languages) students in urban Rhode Island, says:

> *I believe in teaching peace through promoting respect and tolerance in the classroom. I had been aware that many of my students experienced conflict in their homes, sometimes with a partner, but more often with their children who were out of control, had issues with teachers, were being verbally or physically violent. Often I heard things that led me to believe that my students were being emotionally abused. Then there were the Hmong students who were dealing with the effects of terrible trauma in their own country as a result of the war. We also had [other] low-literacy students who were suffering from trauma because of war.... These groups had difficulty learning how to read and write, especially the Liberians. It was hard to know whether learning was so difficult due to under-education or to trauma. Their [the Liberians] problem was just so different because they spoke English very well.... Having Liberian students got me thinking about the effects of trauma on learning. Being involved in the project helped me to focus on the issue.* **(Michele)**

The common thread in all the motivations is the desire to make a positive difference in students' lives.

Crossing the Line

If addressing the impact of violence on learning can have such positive results, then why has this issue not been taken into consideration before now? Traditional western conceptions of education and the assumed divide between education and therapy in adult basic education make it hard to take on the issues of violence with adult learners,[1] because

> we will be judged for doing "inappropriate" work;
>
> we may not recognize the impacts of violence on learning;
>
> we fear we are crossing a line we should not cross; or
>
> we may be fearful of going out on a limb, or of getting in over our heads.

As teachers we are expected to keep our personal lives and the personal lives of our students out of the learning environment. Most of us have been taught, not only by what we learned but also by how we learned, that education is about developing the mind, that it is not about the rest of the body, the spirit, or the emotions. When we take on issues of violence in the classroom, we transgress the expectations that we keep the personal out of the public realm and that we focus solely on the development of our students' mental capacity, to the exclusion of the rest of their beings.

---

[1] For a discussion on the divide between literacy and therapy, and how to connect the two, see Jenny Horsman's "Bridging the Divide between Literacy and Therapy" in *Too Scared to Learn*, (2000).

Crossing those lines goes against the grain of established practice and so leads to tension. We may resort to "doing it alone," being careful not to be seen as crossing the line:

> *We don't talk about violence that much; we tend to ignore that it's happening. And yet in your work, you see it happening all the time. You acknowledge it personally but not with other teachers. You don't say, "Oh, we need training." These were issues that were interfering with teaching, so talking to the individual about what they could do felt automatic, but I don't ever recall bringing it up at a staff meeting. Maybe one of the reasons I didn't raise it was that I didn't want anyone to stop me, to tell me this was an inappropriate topic.* **(Janice)**

We may judge students as simply unmotivated when they seem not to be paying attention:

> *I already knew about violence. And I already knew that oppression was a form of violence. I am politically conscious. But before the project, I never put my politics together with my teaching.... The project made me more sensitive in my teaching position. Before, when someone had an attitude or went to sleep in class it would aggravate me. Now it's a red flag for me. Before it was, "Look if you don't want to learn, don't come." Now I say, "Are you OK?" I've seen that there's a connection between counseling and teaching. I wasn't aware of this before.... I will forever be more conscious of the issue as it affects women in the classroom.* **(Maria)**

We may be told that violence is not as widespread as we witness in our classrooms. Tammy Stockman, a teacher and job coach in a welfare to work program in rural Vermont, expressed her frustration seeing this played out in her work setting:

> *Lately, it seems like the violence has been getting worse, and we need more support than we are getting. One woman came to a class with a loaded pistol because of an abusive partner. There was no place for us to get trained in how to deal with situations like this because the people above us didn't want to hear about it. They'd say, "Don't tell us that there are so many women affected. We don't believe you." What can you say to something like that?*
>
> *Participating in this project enabled us to openly discuss violence and come back with a language to describe it and statistics to say, "You're wrong. This is a huge problem." I am hoping that once this project is over, we will be well informed and have strength in numbers. The people above us won't be able to sweep it under the rug so easily.* **(Tammy)**

Knowing that others are struggling with these issues can be a "life raft," making it possible to take on the challenge and not feel overwhelmed. As Katy Chaffee, teacher and colleague of Tammy, experienced,

> *We're in this whole structure of violence, and at the same time we're trying to acknowledge it in other women's lives. It's sitting here in how we're even being asked to work.... I saw the life raft out there and thought, "Yeah! Grab it!"* **(Katy)**

Our intent is that by sharing the experiences of the teachers in this project this manual will serve as a "life raft" to support you on your journey in taking on the challenge.

Understanding Violence

The ways society conceptualizes violence also blocks this work from becoming more commonplace.

Some of the dominant messages about violence are

we should not see;

we should not get involved;

it is just the way it is and has always been;

it would be naïve to imagine a world without violence; and

violence is an aberration perpetuated by "others" who are insane or out of control.

These messages provide a narrow and stereotypical understanding of violence, and do not allow us to see the complex ways that violence is woven into the fabric of our culture and built into the foundation of our institutions. Given the pervasiveness of violence and its roots in institutions in our society, all of us both experience violence and perpetuate it to varying degrees. Working with issues of violence asks us to become more aware of the ways we have been wounded and the ways we contribute to the wounding, and take steps to heal and challenge the injustices.

We have learned that part of the work of addressing the impacts of violence on learning is to unravel the messages that we are taught and develop deeper understandings of the nature and root causes of violence.

Exploring the Complexities

When people hear the words "women" and "violence," they usually come back with the phrase "domestic violence." The word domestic seems to make it more acceptable and easier to talk about violence. And then what many people want to know about are the statistics. While the statistics may convey the pervasiveness of violence, they do not usually provide the detail that reveals the ways in which different forms of violence are intertwined. These were two of the first things we began to question more deeply: what other forms of violence are being left out when we focus on domestic violence, and how violence is experienced in different people's lives.

As a way to deepen our understanding of violence, participants created study circles in their local areas, drawing in a broad range of people who could help them develop an analysis. Often they read materials and discussed them together (see Tools for Programs, page 20). When we came together for training sessions we continued to build our collective understanding watching videos, listening to audio tapes, and reading extracts of writing out loud. We also created a number of activities; our first used a miscellaneous collection of materials such as sayings, quotes from books, poems, cartoons, as well as statistics to examine the complexities of violence. (See Resources on page 171 for samples of materials.) Through collage making with these materials we explored five different areas of violence:

1. Private — violence in the home or domestic violence
2. Childhood — experiencing or witnessing physical, sexual, or emotional abuse
3. Violence in public space — e.g., assault, rape
4. Workplace violence — e.g., sexual harassment
5. State violence — e.g., war, police violence, welfare

All this work led us to develop a set of assumptions about violence:

Violence is pervasive and takes many forms

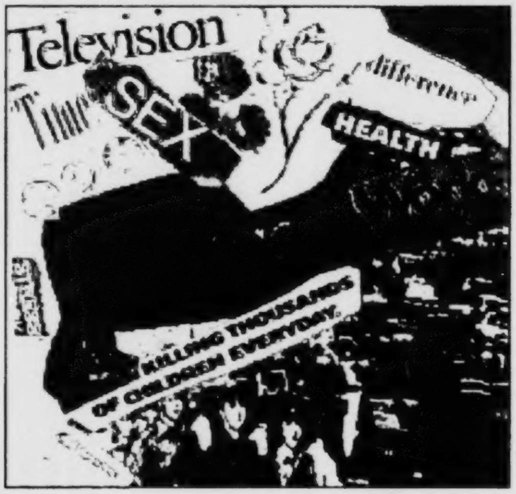
Different forms of violence are intertwined

Violence affects all of us

Violence is institutionally supported

Institutions harm; we all participate in those institutions

(See page 24 for the "Assumptions about Violence" handout.)


Television
Time
SEX
different
HEALTH
KILLING THOUSANDS OF CHILDREN EVERYDAY.

Workshop participant's collage on different forms of violence

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Violence is pervasive and takes many forms. It is important to see the whole range of violence in one picture, including state and individual, public and private. Violence includes childhood sexual, emotional, and physical violence; "domestic" violence; stalking; rape, and the threat of rape in the public sphere; dangerous working conditions, and state-sanctioned violence. Racism, ableism, homophobia, poverty, and other oppressions foster violence.

Our activity creating collages on different areas of violence was particularly useful to help us to see that we did not want to look at domestic violence as the only form of violence affecting women's learning; instead we could see the pervasiveness and similarities and connections among different forms of violence. Whether violence is private or public, in childhood or adulthood, it can affect the self and have an impact on learning.

As we examined violence, we questioned how to recognize the violence of the many "isms" without sliding into familiar territory of work to address one "ism," anti-racism work, for instance. But we found that looking at the issues through the lens of violence brought a new focus. We saw that individual acts of violence are sometimes overtly and sometimes subtly intertwined with oppression in all its forms. People are targeted for violence because of their gender, race, sexual orientation, age, ability, or some combination of these factors.

Different forms of violence are intertwined. All kinds of violence build upon each other in one person's experience. When a woman is made vulnerable by one form of oppression, each additional violence has increased impact and deepens the first violation.

Clarissa Chandler, a feminist therapist specializing in issues of trauma, offered us insights to understand how different forms of violence are intertwined and stored in the body. In her taped presentation, *Being an Ally to Children*, she gives us an image of an empty public space, where one piece of litter becomes many, until the place is filled with trash.

> [This image of littering] came to mean to me all of those daily small assaults where people said, "Well, it was just name-calling," "Well, you just got kicked out of the room for a little while." It meant that there is something called littering and vandalism that could take something intact and collectively, in small bite-sized pieces, destroy it completely. So those daily hassles mattered.... When it becomes too much and we begin to contract...we are trying to move away from something that is life-threatening.
>
> What happens inside us, and inside young people when they are being abused, or inside adults when they are assaulted over and over — whether it is in that overwhelming assault of rape, or in that daily hassle of name-calling or being shunned, being seen as a place where trash can be left, where people don't have to think about how they treat you, or notice the impact on you — you begin to shrink inside. You become smaller and smaller and you become more numb and you exit your body and you begin to use your body as temporary relief. Vacating of our physicality is a very important thing. (Chandler n.d., *Being an Ally to Children*)

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Violence affects all of us. All women are vulnerable to and shaped by the presence of violence. Whether or not we experience life-threatening violence directly, we all live with the possibilities of violence, and all women, and many marginalized men, are diminished daily as a result of violence and our willingness as a society either to accept it or to turn a blind eye to it.

This assumption emerged from our collective experience as women and was sharpened by materials on rape from our collage-making package, which reminded us that public spaces always contain the possibility of harm for women. The materials also drew our attention to the particular experiences for different women: poor women who cannot afford to avoid walking alone at night by taking a cab, lesbians who know that an expression of affection with their partner could result in a physical attack or at least a verbal assault, women with mobility disabilities who cannot run from an attacker, or women of color who are unsafe in a neighborhood just because of the color of their skin.

Violence is institutionally supported. Violence is not perpetrated only by individuals, it is also systemic. The institutions and systems of society support and allow violence to continue. When a court gives a suspended sentence to an abusive husband, when the limitations of welfare leave a woman trapped with an abusive partner, when the only jobs available in a racist, sexist society do not allow a woman to afford safe transportation, daycare, or accommodation, institutions are perpetuating violence.

Institutions harm; we all participate in those institutions. We cannot avoid participating in institutions that perpetuate the violence our society supports.

In adult basic education we see the stark and raw reality of how institutions continue and compound the violence in women's lives. Many of the women we teach are poor and have children, and are forced to negotiate the bureaucracy of government institutions for housing, food, and money to support their family. Some students are mandated to participate in education (or now more likely job training) in order to receive any benefits, and so we as educators are part of the system perpetuating the violence. Working in a welfare-to-work program after "welfare reform" made Katy feel she had to compromise her values to the point where she decided to leave. Tammy voiced clearly her understanding of the violence of the system:

> *I have been aware for years that violence in every possible form is a huge part of the women's lives. Poverty itself is an act of violence. Often the women had to leave early to go to court. Our site was right around the corner from the court house, and the women were in and out of there all the time, dealing with custody and child support issues, addiction and abuse issues. The violence is systemic, not just episodic. The system is set up to hurt and to continue to hurt poor women.*
>
> *My own personal experiences going through the same system enabled me to say things that appeared to be of value to the women. I could give them advice. I was in an abusive relationship myself, so I could offer a personal perspective.* **(Tammy)**

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During the project one of the participant's students, a young pregnant woman, and her child were killed in a car accident on the way to a job skills class. The allowance provided for transportation was insufficient for her to fix her car adequately to drive safely on dangerous winter roads. But as a mandated student she had little option but to attend. Clearly institutional violence is not just an academic concept; it endangers lives.

Many adult educators and others working in social services feel the tension of wanting to work within the system where they feel they can have the most effect, and yet by doing so, feel as if they are supporting the violence of the system.

> *I have real despair when I think about continuing to work within this system. I'm seriously considering bailing out because what I'm supposed to be doing is not what I see as the real need for these women. I'm fueled by my own personal passion to help women heal. My goal for when I become rich and famous is to run a women's retreat center. In the meantime, I'm going to try to stick it out a while longer here. But I'm not sure how good it is for me to work within the welfare system. I went from being a welfare recipient, basically traumatized by the system, to working within it. I think this traumatizes me over and over again. Hopefully over time, my work will evolve and I'll find a way to work outside the welfare system in ways that promote women's healing.* **(Tammy)**

This is what Clarissa Chandler says about the connection between the violence of the system and violence against individuals:

> We live in a system in North America that is really money and greed driven. We are nurtured on greed as normalcy, and we are encouraged not to see the humanity in other people, particularly if we can benefit from them. There are two targets of that greed: the human body and land. And when we look at how that greed works and why those are the two targets it is because we cannot sustain life or accumulate wealth without those two things: the energy from the planet and the energy from other human beings....
>
> The greed and dehumanizing of people is not neutral, it did not happen accidentally.... It is important for us to remember that because when we look at issues like racism, sexism, disability, anti-Semitism, and heterosexism, we think it is just out there floating in society.... It is important for us to remember that we all get taught....
>
> When we look at the experiences of little girls, the experiences of children of color in North America, and the experiences of "imperialism," and we look at native people and their displacement and their corrallment...we begin to understand we are after something. We are after the human body and the land. When we look at the history of slavery in North America, both in the U.S. and Canada, we realize it is not neutral. Somebody made a decision about how much money they could get. Somebody made a decision about how much land they could get, and that we are constantly making those decisions.
>
> When I think about the experiences of young children who are sexually and physically abused...when we realize their survival depends on their ability to surrender their bodies at will, we realize it is not neutral. An

> adult knows they can benefit and feel better for a moment if they allow that compulsion to emerge and just take that child because they can. It is that simple. Adults batter children and sexually abuse them because they can.
>
> When we look at the experiences of women who are battered or raped...they happen because they can. We have been educated to believe that men own women, that women are throwaways — the same belief that we have that adults own children. Those kinds of values mean that I get to use at will if I so choose. One of the things that is so powerful about that for me is that when I look at racism it is the same experience. When my parents said to me every morning, "You are black, let me explain what that means, these are the risks you run today, if you face them this is what you are to do," what they meant was today someone could pick you off the street, batter you senseless, and throw away your body because you are black. And what they meant was when you go to work and someone requires you to do tasks that no one else is required to do, when they pay you less, they mean we want you to labor for the benefit of someone else and be grateful for the opportunity to do so.... What it means is that if I live in a society which I know does not value me, appreciate me, is not connected to the ways I find joy...what is threatened is my very physical being. (Chandler n.d., *Being an Ally to Children*)

To understand power and oppression, we also turned to Starhawk (1987). She says, "Only when we know how we have been shaped by the structures of power in which we live can we become shapers."

She explores three types of power: power-over, power-from-within, and power-with:

> Power-over shapes every institution of our society.... It may rule with weapons that are physical or by controlling the resources we use to live: money, food, medical care; or by controlling more subtle resources: information, approval, love.... The consciousness that underlies power-over sees the world as an object, made up of many separate, isolated parts that have no intrinsic life, awareness, or value. Consciousness is fragmented, disconnected. Power-over motivates through fear.
>
> Power-from-within...arises from our sense of connection, our bonding with other human beings, and with the environment.... We do not have to earn value. Immanent value cannot be rated or compared. No one, nothing, can have more of it than another. Nor can we lose it. For we are, ourselves, the living body of the sacred.
>
> Power-with...[is] the power of a strong individual in a group of equals, the power not to command, but to suggest and be listened to, to begin something and see it happen. The source of power-with is the willingness of others to listen to our ideas. We could call that willingness respect, not for a role, but for each unique person.... It bridges the value systems of power-from-within and power-over. Power-with sees the world as a pattern of relationships, but its interest is in how that pattern can be shaped, molded, shifted. (1987:9-15)

As teachers we act as "shapers" in the world and, as such, have a responsibility to understand and use our power well — to be the bridge and invoke power-with among groups.

Clarissa Chandler mirrors Starhawk's teachings and our belief that we all need to understand our relationship to power and the privilege we have as teachers.

> As a society, we are trained to believe that we get power and value and appreciation from privilege, a thing outside of ourselves.... We do not become powerful from privilege. We can steal someone else's power, but we do not become internally powerful from it. It makes us greedy, it makes us powerful over other people, but it does not make us better human beings who are more powerful at bringing forward something new. (Chandler n.d., *Being an Ally to Children*)

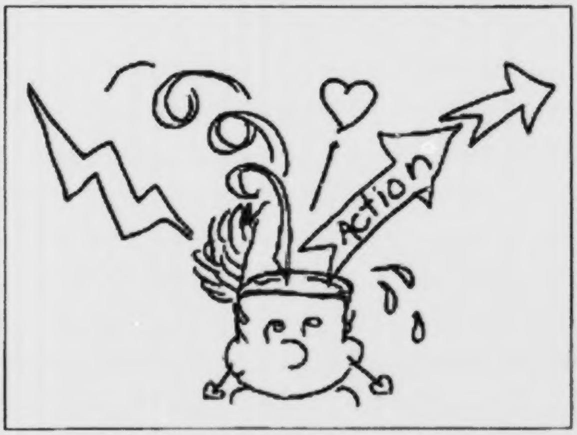
Recognizing the Impacts of Violence on Learning

All the teachers could identify and describe the ways in which violence has affected their learners, their colleagues, and themselves (see "Mapping the Evidence" activity on page 22). Every teacher knew a student who "spaces out" or a young woman who is "continuously in crisis mode." Other impacts that participants named included a lack of trust, lack of appropriate boundaries, not feeling entitled to hope, constant drama, numbness, depression, women suddenly quitting in the middle of something, or setting what appeared to be totally unrealistic goals.

Jenny Horsman documented the impacts in *Too Scared to Learn* (2000). We used Jenny's research as the foundation on which to base our work and to better understand how violence impacts learning. We found the way Jenny frames her understanding of learning in the context of trauma very helpful:

> The hidden impacts of trauma
>
> The challenge of setting goals
>
> Bringing the whole person to learning

(See *Too Scared to Learn* — Chapters 4, 5, and 6, also "Too Scared to Learn: Impacts of Violence on Learning" handout on pages 25–26.)



Sally Gabb's comment on exploring the complexities of violence at the initial institute

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The Hidden Impacts of Trauma

The hidden impacts of trauma are ones that we all see in teaching. They are coping skills women have learned to function in the world, the tools needed to survive. They have therefore been very useful; however, they may get in the way and take energy away from learning. They may also take energy to keep "hidden," or at least to keep the reasons hidden.

Jenny names five hidden impacts:

1. an "all or nothing" approach to learning and relationships;
2. a lack of presence;
3. living in crisis mode;
4. issues with trust and boundaries; and
5. silences/disclosures.

All or nothing. "All or nothing" refers to students who are more than impatient about their learning, and want, for instance, to pass all their GED tests now. There is no middle ground in violent relationships. For example, if you answer a question you are either right or wrong and "wrong" can mean you will be harmed. These students do not see progress in small incremental changes. They want to learn in leaps and bounds or not at all. This attitude may also be applied to relationships, making it very hard to recover from what may appear to the other person as a small infraction.

Lack of presence. Not being present allows us to not fully take in what is happening to us, which provides some protection from being harmed. But not being present can also make it difficult to learn. How often can we say that we are present? We all "space out" to one degree or another for a myriad of reasons. All teachers working in adult basic education have been frustrated by students who just don't seem interested enough to pay attention no matter what they try. A smell, a sound, anything may touch upon something for a person who has experienced trauma and cause them to "leave," to be there in body but not in mind. We do not need to be fully present to learn or work well, but we do need to have some awareness and inner regulator that allows us to balance the different things in our consciousness at one time. The questions we asked in the project were: Can we as teachers find ways to recognize this and help learners be aware of their degree of presence, and what they need to be able to work well? Can we create conditions that allow women to bring their whole selves to learning, and by doing so, access different ways of being present at different times? (In Chapter 3, we look at how programs can change and what positive effects there are for students.)

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Crisis mode. If what you have known in life is surviving from one crisis to another, that is how you have learned to live, that is what you do well. Some women may embrace crises because it feels familiar and somehow secure. This does not necessarily allow for the consistency and concentration required in most educational settings. It may mean that calm is unfamiliar to the point of discomfort. It may also mean that you can cope with very difficult situations, but the skills you are relying on may not translate well into accessing parts of yourself for learning. The WVAE teachers asked, Can we find ways to create a sense of "space" — physically, room to spread out; emotionally, room for joy and sadness; spiritually, room to expand your sense of yourself — in the learning environment? If we do so we foster a sense of "spaciousness" in other areas of women's lives where they can live new possibilities and imagine new selves. (This is discussed further in Chapter 3.)

Trust and boundaries. All of us have known trust broken. If the trust in someone important in your life has been irrevocably broken, from that trauma you have probably learned that much of your energy must go to protecting yourself and establishing safe boundaries. You may not have learned how to trust or set boundaries. Teachers working with the project explored how the classroom can become a place where these issues are actively addressed rather than ignored. So that rather than this energy leading to tension and possible blow-ups, the classroom can become a place of safety and comfort, a place where people can use their energy to learn.

Silence/disclosure. When considering issues of violence we may be fearful of disclosures — both our own and those of others — that we cannot cope with. As teachers, we may also be familiar with feeling we have failed a student who does disclose and then disappears. As part of the project work, participants were encouraged to put time and resources into designing a support system rather than avoiding the issue of possible disclosure. (Support systems are discussed further in Chapter 2.)

If as teachers we are able to recognize, understand, and honor these coping skills and the trauma behind them, we may then be able to create conditions where women can use the skills to enhance learning rather than block it.

The Challenge of Setting Goals

One of the first things many adult learners are asked to do when they enroll in a program is to set down an education plan with their goals. As teachers we know how difficult this can be, maybe because the stated goals seem impossible to reach, or because the student does not seem to have any goals. Jenny looks at the need to integrate control, connection, and meaning: for anyone to have clear and achievable goals, they must be able to control certain parts of their own lives, feel connected to the outcome of decisions they make, and therefore see the meaning in what they decide to do. Jenny quotes Judith Herman (1992), who says experiences of violence "overwhelm the ordinary systems of care that give people a sense of control, connection, and meaning." In the project we explored ways to put back those ordinary systems of care.

For those of us who have experienced violence, control may be very complicated terrain. We may have very tight control over some areas of life and none in others. Other people may have, or have had, total control over us; we may, in turn, use inappropriate power to control others. This history may complicate the power dynamics between teacher and learner.

Having experienced trauma, we may need to reconnect to parts of ourselves that have been shut down, and therefore also connect meaning to what we do. This may mean reconnecting in healing ways to our emotions and spirits. If we have lost meaning, we will certainly have difficulty making meaning out of words. The title of Elsa Auerbach's book about teaching English as a Second Language is significant: *Making Meaning, Making Change* (1997). We cannot make change without having meaning.

Bringing the Whole Person to Learning

Throughout this first chapter we have talked about accessing different parts of the self in order to work with the impacts of trauma. As the whole person is affected by violence, one's entire being may feel injured and fragmented. The process of healing involves restoring a sense of wellness and balance to all aspects of ourselves — the spirit, emotions, body, and mind. We need to heal each part of the self: the spirit that may have been crushed causing a feeling of worthlessness; emotions that may be overwhelming, such as fear, panic, sadness or anger; the body that may have injuries and illnesses, both old and new, each building on the other; and the mind that may be limited because the person was repeatedly told they were stupid.

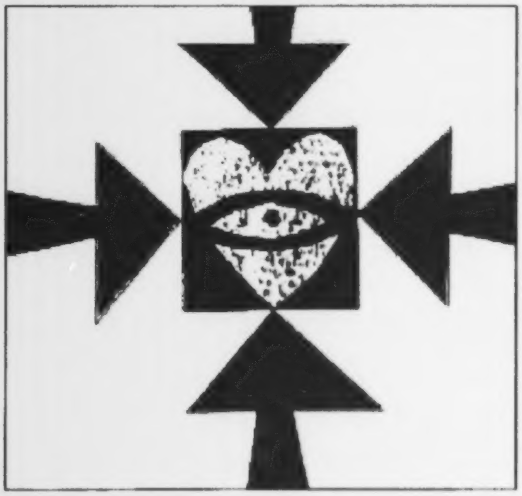
Many different traditions point us in the same direction of needing to balance the parts of the whole, to heal or to maintain well-being. Two examples are the Medicine Wheel of indigenous peoples of North America, and Buddhist teachings of mindfulness and meditation.

> According to Absolon, the word "heal" has the same roots as the word "whole" and "holiness." The interdependence of holiness and wholeness are integral to healing and teaching in Aboriginal Tradition: "[t]he holiness, or sacredness, of healing is manifested as a striving towards wholeness of spirit and an attempt to incorporate this wholeness of spirit into ourselves, our families, our communities, and the environment" (Absolon 1994:5). In the Traditional worldview, wholeness or holism is equated with balance. "Healing is a therapeutic process, an evolution toward balance; the process accesses essential healing dynamics which are spiritual in quality and power." (Absolon 1994:7)
>
> Accumulated anthropological evidence indicates that Aboriginal people, prior to contact with Europeans, had a sophisticated and effective system of healing that was based on a holistic worldview (Weatherford 1988). According to Ed Conners, a Mohawk educator, "The healing system accepted that maintaining health and effecting healing required a knowledge of the interaction between the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual" (1994:2). A healthy lifestyle rests upon the ability to maintain a balanced commitment to growth and maintenance in all four areas of the Medicine Wheel. (Graveline, 1998:76)

Buddhist teachings mirror the four areas of the medicine wheel using a slightly different format and wording. Thich Nhat Hanh, a master in Zen Buddhist tradition, says this about mindfulness and meditation:

> In Buddhism we call the objects of the mind dharmas. Dharmas are usually grouped into five categories:
>
> 1. bodily and physical forms
> 2. feelings
> 3. perceptions
> 4. mental functionings
> 5. consciousness
>
> These five categories are called the five aggregates. The fifth category, consciousness, however, contains all the other categories and is the basis of their existence. Contemplation on interdependence is a deep looking into all dharmas in order to pierce through to their real nature, in order to see them as part of the great body of reality and in order to see that the great body of reality is indivisible. It cannot be cut into pieces with separate existences of their own. (1975:64)
>
> The function of meditation practice is to heal and transform. Meditation, as understood in my tradition of Buddhism, helps us to be whole, and look deeply into ourselves and around us in order to realize what is really there. (1993:vii)

We look at the value of bringing the whole person to teaching and learning in the next two chapters. It is at the center of how we take on the work of addressing the impact of violence on learning. The work radiates out from that center as a wheel that will only be balanced if all the radiating parts are evenly supported.



Workshop participant's collage visualizing healing all parts of self

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Tools for Programs: Reflect and Take Action

Taking First Steps

1. What might be your first step? Who is an ally who you can talk to about this? Talk with that person, then write down one small step you want to take.
2. Can you do an activity with the people you work with? Look at the following pages and see if there is something you can bring to a staff meeting or use with a group of colleagues.
3. Begin collecting materials such as articles, cartoons, poems, and pictures relating to different forms of violence. (See page 9 for the categories we used for an activity and the Resources section for sample materials.)
4. Have a brainstorm with students and colleagues on assumptions about violence. Follow this with a discussion about the "Assumptions about Violence" handout on page 24.
5. Use magazines and materials you collect to create collages. Begin with a brainstorm, then have each person make a collage, or have groups make individual collages that relate to a specific form of violence or assumption, and piece their collages together to make a quilt. (See Chapter 3 page 100 for activity.)
6. Do the hidden impacts of violence sound familiar to you? Look at the "Too Scared to Learn: Impact of Violence on Learning" handout on page 25, and if you would like to read more before bringing colleagues together, see Jenny Horsman's article, "But I am Not a Therapist" in the Resources section. For more detailed analysis, read Jenny Horsman's book, *Too Scared to Learn.*

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Protection
Revolution
Refuses to Die
Enduring
Unsettled
Under
SPIRIT
Envy

Collage created by workshop participant on "Assumptions about Violence"

Thinking about including issues of violence in the classroom can be daunting. However, there is a wide range of ways teachers may address the issues. The first step may be getting the support of program staff and/or students; it may be thinking of ways to change the physical space to create a supportive learning environment; it may be establishing connections to outside agencies for referrals and support; it may be thinking about ways to change curriculum; or more often a combination of these.

Some of the steps the WVAE programs included are:

- Learn about the issues yourself — read, go online
- Raise the issue with colleagues
- Set up a workshop for staff in your program
- Form a planning group (This may be a politically strategic group or the start of a support network or both)
- Organize a staff retreat
- Send a letter/questionnaire to find allies in local agencies
- Meet with a local counselor/therapist and discuss ways to work together
- Survey the program participants on their needs and interests

The key to all of the starting points is support. We have included questions, activities, and handouts to help you reflect on the issues and generate ideas. Following these resources, examples from the work of the WVAE programs will show specific ways of getting started in different settings and may inspire new ideas. Throughout the Source Book there are examples of positive outcomes for both teachers and students.

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Mapping the Evidence: Impacts of Violence and Learning

Preparing Your Thinking to Talk to Colleagues

Free Writing

- Spend five minutes "free writing" about how you came to be aware that violence in women's lives is an important issue in education. If you are having trouble writing, write about that; just keep writing for five minutes.
- Underline the most important sentence in your piece.
- Circle the most significant word in your story.

Taking it Further

Use the following questions to prompt your reflective writing

1. What "evidence" have you seen, heard, and sensed that tells you that violence affects many students and their learning?
2. What actions have you taken in your classroom, program, or community to address the issue of violence in women's lives and to create a learning environment that takes issues of violence into account?
3. What helps you to address the issue? What hinders you from addressing the issue?
4. What is the most burning question you have about the issue?

Read through all your writing and write a brief statement to open a discussion about this issue with your colleagues.

Mapping the Evidence: Impacts of Violence and Learning

Facilitator's Guidelines for a Group Activity

Free Writing

- Prepare a large newsprint "graffiti" board for participants to post their writing on later.
- Invite the group to write for five minutes about how they became aware that violence in women's lives is an important issue in education.
- Ask them to underline the most important sentence in their piece.
- Have them write the sentence on a single page to share.
- Ask each person to read their sentence, then add it to the graffiti board.
- Invite everyone to observe the collected comments and talk about the key themes revealed. Look for themes, commonalities, and differences to add to this process.
- Ask each participant to circle what they consider to be the most significant word in their story.
- Go through a similar process of sharing and observing key themes, as was done with the sentences.

Focusing

- In four corners of the room, post newsprint with headings for four questions:
  1. ***Evidence*** — What "evidence" do you have (what have you seen, heard, sensed) that tells you that violence affects the lives of many students and their learning?
  2. ***Actions*** — What actions have you taken in your classroom/program/community to address the issue of violence in women's lives and to create a learning environment that takes issues of violence into account?
  3. ***Supports/hindrances*** — What helps you to address the issue? What hinders you from addressing the issue?
  4. ***Burning Questions*** — What is the most burning question you have about the issue?
- Divide the large group into four small groups. These groups stay together for the rest of the mapping activity.
- Each group goes to one of the four stations and writes their responses on the newsprint.
- After 15 minutes, the groups rotate to the next station where they read what the previous group has written and then add their own responses.
- After each group has responded to each of the questions, all the newsprints are hung on the wall. Participants are asked to silently go around the room and review the responses.
- Invite large group discussion on similarities, differences, and key themes in people's responses.

Assumptions about Violence

Violence is pervasive and takes many forms.

It is important to see the whole range of violence in one picture, including state and individual, public, and private. Violence includes childhood sexual, emotional, and physical violence; "domestic" violence and stalking; rape and the threat of rape in the public sphere; dangerous working conditions, and state-sanctioned violence. Racism, ableism, homophobia, poverty, sexism, and other oppressions foster violence.

Different forms of violence are intertwined.

All kinds of violence build upon each other in one person's experience. When a woman is made vulnerable by one form of oppression, each additional violence has increased impact and deepens the first violation.

Violence affects all of us.

All women are vulnerable to and shaped by the presence of violence. Whether or not we experience life-threatening violence directly, we all live with the possibilities of violence, and all women, and many marginalized men, are diminished daily as a result of violence and our willingness as a society either to accept it or to turn a blind eye to it.

Violence is institutionally supported.

Violence is not only perpetrated by individuals, it is also systemic. The institutions and systems of society support and allow violence to continue. When a court gives a suspended sentence to an abusive husband, when the limitations of welfare leave a woman trapped with an abusive partner, when the only jobs available in a racist, sexist society do not allow a woman to afford safe transportation, daycare, or accommodation, institutions are perpetuating violence.

Institutions harm; we all participate in those institutions.

We cannot avoid participating in institutions that perpetuate the violence our society supports.

Too Scared to Learn:[1] Impacts of Violence on Learning

Hidden Impacts of Trauma

All or nothing — There is no middle ground. Students may move from trusting someone completely to having no trust in them at all, from thinking they're doing brilliantly to seeing themselves as failing. Some learners start with great enthusiasm, then quit when they are faced with the day-to-day slog.

Presence — It is hard to stay present enough to learn, especially if learning is stressful. For example, if the classroom doesn't feel safe, or something (e.g., a smell, a sound, a sight, a physical sensation) reminds a student of a time when they were not safe, they may "space out" or "leave."

Living with crises — Crises may distract and make it hard to be present and learn. If crises are what is familiar, then calm may be hard to cope with.

Trust and boundaries — If people who should have been trustworthy weren't, then a person's energy may go towards figuring out who to trust and what secrets to trust them with.

Telling — When students are asked to write or talk about their lives they are always deciding how much to tell. They may be ashamed of telling the truth about themselves.

Experiences of violence can take our energy away from learning; hiding the problems may take even more energy.

Setting Goals

A sense of control, connection, and meaning is necessary to set goals, yet experiences of violence "overwhelm the ordinary systems of care that give people a sense of control, connection and meaning."[2]

Control — Control is a complicated terrain. While some learners don't like being controlled, they may also be mistrustful of being in control. When students stop and start programs, they may be trying out some form of control.

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[1] Drawn from Horsman, J. *Too Scared to Learn: Women, Violence and Education.* Toronto, Ontario: McGilligan Books/Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1999/2000.

[2] Herman, J. *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence — from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror.* New York: Basic Books, 1992.

Too Scared to Learn: Impacts of Violence on Learning

Connection — Connection is necessary for communication. We can't assume learners can connect. Building connections may take a lot of work and takes time.

Meaning — Trauma can result in a loss of "meaning." This may make it hard to imagine goals and to find meaning in life or in words.

The Whole Person

The whole person is affected by violence. Many feel fragmented, disconnected from the self, and unable to learn.

Spirit — Violence convinces many that they are worthless, that they are nothing and nobody.

Emotions — Fear or panic lead many to close down. Sadness may lead to anger to avoid feeling.

Body — Violence may cause injuries or illnesses to be absorbed in the body.

Mind — When learners have been told repeatedly that they are stupid, they may internalize this message.

Supports

Where educators and programs see the aftermath of violence as separate from education, students may have no access to or information about supports such as counselors, or other culturally appropriate resources, to assist in addressing issues and focusing on the desired learning.

Indigenous Teaching[1]

Traditionalists continue to believe that the more of our senses — sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch — that we use in learning/teaching something, the more likely we are to understand and remember it. As Minh-ha poetically expresses it: "We write — think and feel — [with] our entire bodies rather than only our minds or hearts. It is a perversion to consider thought the product of one specialized organ: the brain; and feelings, that of the heart" (1989:36).[2]

Ancestral sources of knowledge incorporated and added to the rational, logical data. According to a local Mi'kmaq source, the Elders have always taught that there are five physical senses and six non-physical senses: thinking, memory, imagination, dreaming, visioning, and spirit travelling (Pictou 1993).[3]

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[1] From: Graveline, Fyre Jean. *Circle Works: Transforming Euro-centric Consciousness.* Halifax, Nova Scotia: Fernwood Publishing, 1998:77.

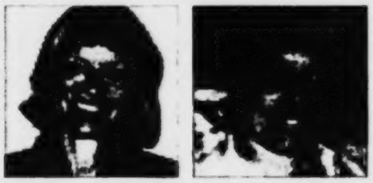
[2] Minh-ha, T. *Woman Native Other.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989.

[3] Pictou, P. Personal communication with author. March 17, 1993.

Examples from Programs

In this part of Chapter 1, the programs that participated in the Women, Violence, and Adult Education project are described. Following these descriptions are ways programs got started to address the impact of violence on learning. We use three programs as examples.

Program Descriptions



Getting Ready to Work

Vermont Adult Learning
White River Junction, Vermont
Katy Chaffee and Tammy Stockman

White River Junction is situated on the banks of the White River as it meets the Connecticut, the natural divide between New Hampshire and Vermont. It is the largest town within 35 to 40 miles in Vermont, and a center for services such as courts, welfare, employment, community college. Many participants in the Getting Ready to Work program commute from outlying areas.

Throughout this area, known as the Upper Valley, and in the state of Vermont in general, the affordable housing pool is far smaller than the demand. Many people move out to rural areas to find cheaper rents, but then reliable transportation becomes a problem. Housing, childcare needs, and transportation are big issues for the women in our program.

Our Getting Ready to Work office is on North Main Street in the central area of the old downtown. We have quickly become known as the place with the purple door. Thanks to the advice of our participants, our door became a distinctive shade of purple this year, complete with a lovely lace curtain. Our facility is a storefront space that is a long, rectangular room with large front windows allowing us wonderful light and sunshine. There is a comfortable small sitting area with a resource board and a tiny play area in the front; two desk/work centers with computers; and a partitioned meeting area for groups with refreshments. In the back, a separate office room and small meeting area offer more quiet and privacy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Our three part-time staff include Katy Chaffee, Dede Mackie, and Tammy Stockman. We are funded to serve welfare clients, primarily women who are single parents with work mandates. Their lives are compromised by very little income. As a result of recent changes to the welfare legislation, there are enormous pressures on our participants that are very confusing. Because of labor shortages and entry-level wage increases, many welfare recipients left and found decent work. The lives of participants referred to our program now commonly have more complicated life situations — both in degree and scope. They also have less time to address problems, develop skills, or gain education, which in turn diminishes their self-confidence and self-esteem.

Last year we had about 35 people in our program. We offer classes and individual help at our site. We also collaborate with partners such as our vocational center, community college, vocational rehabilitation services, and local adult education tutor/teacher. Each participant designs plans and goals that fit their unique situation, and our staff helps provide the bridge to many community resources. Sometimes they have clear needs and wants; more often the answers are a process of discovery.

Our participants are not mandated; they choose to take action to make a difference in their lives and the lives of their children. We speak honestly here about topics like depression, learning disabilities, healing, and losses, as well as gifts, accomplishments, and careers. We laugh a lot! We are friends. During our holiday luncheon, one participant commented that she appreciated the sense of family here, being appreciated and respected for who you are, not judged.

We are happy to have the opportunity through the Women, Violence, and Education grant to pilot new ways to approach the legacy of violence in women's lives, sometimes very overt, but more often quite subtle. This fall we offered a women's support group that addressed issues of trauma by teaching mindfulness and meditation techniques. We explored topics like listening, trust, our heart's desire, and what gives us peace. We tried to create a sense of spaciousness in our lives.

"But I'm Not a Therapist"

"But I'm Not a Therapist: The Challenge of Creating Effective Literacy Learning for Survivors of Trauma"
Horsman, Jenny, Sue Shore. (Ed.) Paper published in: Australian Council for Adult Literacy 21st National Conference: Literacy on the Line. Conference Proceedings. Adelaide: University of South Australia, 1998. Also available at: www.jennyhorsman.com, click on "Articles."

Introduction

Learners may start in literacy or other education programs with desperate hope to finally improve their literacy skills or education, and begin to make essential changes in their lives. Women who live with daily violence may believe that improved literacy skills will be a first step towards enough education to find a paid job and escape. However, if there is no acknowledgment of the impacts of trauma on learning, rather than a chance to improve their literacy skills and succeed, learners may get only a chance to fail and to confirm to themselves that they really cannot learn. Learners and workers alike may become frustrated, despairing over the lack of possibilities for real change.

In recent research, I looked at the impact of violence on women's literacy learning and program participation in order to develop approaches to literacy work to help women learn better. My interviews involved literacy workers, literacy learners, therapists, counselors and organizational staff in focus group sessions, individual interviews of various lengths, and through computer networks. I concentrated on two key questions: What impacts of abuse do you see in your literacy program/your work? How can/should literacy programs address these impacts of violence? I interviewed women (and a few men) in five regions of Canada — British Columbia, the Prairies, Central Canada, Atlantic Canada, and the North.[1]

For the most part little is written or said about the links between violence and literacy. Anecdotal accounts of literacy workers who have discovered that all, or most, of the students in a class have experienced sexual or physical abuse as children, certainly suggest that a formal study might reveal that horrifyingly high numbers of adults — both women and men — in literacy programs experienced abuse as children. Although people often ask me about the statistics, I decided not to focus on that question. For me, the most pressing question is not how many literacy learners have experienced trauma but how literacy programs can teach most effectively. Even if the numbers of women in literacy programs who have experienced violence are no higher than the general population, we still need to know how to carry out literacy work in ways which are inclusive and effective for women who have survived trauma. We have to assume that every class will include at least some people with this experience.[2]

Exploring Violence and Trauma

The breadth of violence I heard about in relation to literacy during interviews and related reading gives an indication of the complex ways violence and its aftermath enters into the adult education setting. As I talked to people and read for this project, I heard layer upon layer of violent experiences, many of which I had not previously thought about. Literacy workers described a range of violence they had seen or heard about in their classrooms and spoke of feeling "inept" as they wondered how to respond to support learners and their learning.

Experience of trauma and its aftermath — whether in childhood or adulthood — is likely the present reality for many, if not most, literacy learners. In literacy programming, we cannot take refuge in the silence about such trauma, it is vividly present in the classroom in many dimensions. The experience of trauma cannot be framed as "abnormal" and individualized; we cannot fall into the trap of suggesting that learners can go away and "heal" from the trauma and come back to class when they are ready to learn. In literacy programming we must recognize the effects of trauma and create literacy opportunities that are viable for learners who are "familiar with trauma," enabling them to learn while they continue to "live beside the violation."[3] To maintain silence about the extent of violence in society, or to understand their experience in terms of pathology and ill health is to fail learners. Survivors of trauma are like canaries in the mine: rather than seeing them as dysfunctional, we need to recognize that they warn society about the dangers of normalized violence. We should honor the increased sensitivities that living with trauma brings and design literacy programming that supports learners to value themselves and develop their literacy skills.

Beyond Appearing "Normal": "Hidden" Impacts of Trauma

The impacts of trauma I heard about from the therapists, counselors, and literacy workers that I interviewed led me to an exploration of these impacts and an examination of new possibilities for literacy practice. A range of issues that are not usually visible take energy away from the literacy learning process for many students who are survivors of trauma. These issues create, in themselves, areas of learning that women must struggle with if they are to be successfully "present" in the classroom and learn to read. The complexity of learners' "presence," their lack of comfort with ambiguity, a tendency to see everything as "all or nothing," are overarching challenges interlock with a series of issues impinging on literacy learning. These issues include building trust, establishing boundaries, deciding which stories to tell, learning to move out of crises, and assessing the level of safety in the class or group.

Seeing the complexity of awareness for both workers and learners around issues like presence, trust, boundaries, and crises adds an awareness to why learning to read is such a difficult and lengthy process. Where the struggles around each of these issues are ones that a literacy learner has to carry out in privacy — because to reveal her difficulties in these areas is to be judged "abnormal" — then the energy required is compounded. Energy is needed not only to struggle with the difficulties but also to hide this struggle. It is crucial, therefore, that within the literacy program the range of what is normal is broadened and the discourse is opened up to talk about the struggles that many learners will have in a broad range of areas. If the challenges learners face are an active part of the curriculum, then all learners can benefit. The challenges that need to become part of the curriculum include exploring what it takes to be fully present in the classroom and the knowledge gained from the times of less presence; discovering a deeper understanding of ambiguity and middle ground rather than staying with the stark contrasts of all or nothing; considering crises and how to live both in and out of crisis; examining questions of trust in terms of the possibility of trusting their own knowledge and trusting others in the class or group not to judge and put them down; learning to set boundaries and respect the boundaries of others; deciding which stories to tell when; and creating a safer place to learn.

Learning in the Context of Trauma: The Challenge of Setting Goals

The definition of trauma used by Judith Herman reveals connections between literacy and trauma. Herman states that trauma is caused by events that "overwhelm the ordinary systems of care that give people a sense of control, connection and meaning" (1992:33). Many writers have suggested that therapy for trauma victims should be directed at helping the survivor to regain a sense of control, connection, and meaning in her life. I suggest that a shift away from addressing these issues solely as aspects of individual healing and toward a focus on control, connection, and meaning is integral to literacy learning. Control, connection, and meaning are all centrally connected to the tasks of setting goals, a key aspect of how literacy programming is increasingly being organized. Setting goals may seem a straightforward task where simple skills can be taught to those who have difficulty. But for survivors of trauma, setting goals is far from simple. The difficulty is not simply skills acquisition but a far more complex intertwining of issues, requiring more nuanced learning.

Control is an important terrain for those who have experienced trauma. Feeling out of control, trying to regain control, not wanting to own any control, controlling in hidden manipulative ways, feeling responsible, disowning responsibility — all of this is a complex and fraught area. Seeking control but feeling helpless and believing that control is impossibility is a contradictory dynamic. Being in control also entails being responsible, being blamed, and blaming oneself. This complex dynamic around control is important within literacy. Many literacy programs stress learner-centered learning, learners designing their own individualized plan, and controlling their own learning and setting goals. Some also seek to involve learners in sharing control of the program through participating on committees or boards of directors. This "mine field" is often entered without preparation or even awareness of how complex and problematic raising control issues may be for some literacy learners as well as for some workers.

More and more in adult literacy work the discourse of identifying measurable outcomes, or at least "observable" outcomes, and organizing learning around learners' own goals is the dominant discourse that organizes literacy practice. It is hard to question such an approach. Who doesn't want learners to shape their goals and learn material that will help them meet their goals? Yet for survivors of trauma, working with the complexity of control, connection, and meaning, goal setting may be a challenging, if not impossible, demand, because to set goals you have to believe that you have some possibility of control, a connection at least to the self, and the belief that life can have meaning.

Engaging the Whole Person in Learning

Recognizing the whole person offers new potential for literacy learning. My recognition of four aspects of the person came primarily from the various Canadian First Nations educators I talked to. They told me about the concept of the medicine wheel and of balance between four aspects of the person: body, mind, emotion, and spirit. Aline LaFlamme, a métis healer in the Northwest Territories, made the concept most powerfully clear when she drew me the medicine wheel. Instead of a balance between the four quadrants, she drew most of the circle as the mind, two tiny "quadrants" for the body and emotions, and an even smaller section for the spirit. She said her drawing illustrated the lack of balance in North American society. She felt that the mind is given far too much weight. Aline helped me to see that, given that lack of balance, it is not surprising that literacy learners who are not judged as excelling in the mind often feel that they are not valued. As I described this off-balance wheel, a survivor and advisor to the project used it to illustrate that "healing" for individuals can be problematic if we think of healing as learning to function better in a "sick," off-balance world.

Looking at the person in terms of four aspects challenged me to think about how the damage I heard about in my interviews could also lead to new possibilities for literacy work and how a focus on the body, mind, emotions, and spirit could be more than just addressing "damage." It could be a process where each aspect was fully engaged in a creative learning process, where literacy would be more fully holistic and part of a "healing" process not only of the individual but of the educational process. Canadian First Nations literacy workers have begun to create models appropriate to their community. The challenge now remains for other communities to explore appropriate models. A further question — whether such models will be an alternative in literacy, leaving the mainstream unchallenged, or whether such shifts can be seen as valuable for all literacy learners — remains. Within literacy learning, there is potential to move away from diagnostic models that pathologize those who have experienced trauma and, instead, to support all literacy learners in learning and claiming their power and questioning the concept of "normal life."

Bridging the Divide between Literacy and Therapy

Traditionally, literacy and therapy are seen as entirely separate. Frequently, however, literacy workers are called upon to carry out a counseling role, though many feel unprepared to and unclear whether they should. There is tension between the value of clarity about boundaries between therapy and literacy and the value of recognizing that the division between the two fields is arbitrary and unreal. Through creating a variety of bridges between the two disciplines and making therapy and counseling more visible within literacy programs, the frame that implies impacts of trauma are only to be addressed in isolation between a woman and her therapist (so that a woman can return to "normal" and resume ordinary life as soon as possible) is interrupted. It is important both to recognize the value of individual therapy and also to move away from assumptions that a woman should go away and heal and come back to literacy when she is "better."

Listening to the range of options currently available inside and outside literacy programs, it was obvious that no single answer would address the question of appropriate links with counseling organizations or answer whether literacy workers need to be trained in counseling. The situations of literacy workers are so diverse. It did seem crucial that all programs recognize that some learners will be dealing with issues of trauma and may need access to culturally appropriate counseling or other services. This means programs need to assess what services are available in their community and consider what capacity is needed within the programs to make good links and provide solid support for learners who are continuing with their learning in the program and also seeking counseling.

Some knowledge of counseling within a program and strong links with counseling services — whether offered internally or by another organization or organizations — would enable a program to function in a more balanced fashion. Few programs currently explore the links they might be able to generate with outside counseling programs or counseling departments in their institution. Programs could build greater visibility and more creative alternative possibilities for learners getting counseling support.

Examining the Costs of Bearing Witness

Literacy workers experience an enormous number of challenges in their work. The contradictory pressures silence talk about the extent of violence that workers and learners experience while leading many workers to believe they should be able to listen to anything learners want to share, provide exhaustive support to learners, and successfully teach everyone to read in record time. Alongside such tension is the continual pressure in literacy for workers to do enormous amounts of work of all sorts, often for little pay, benefits, or appreciation. Workers are frequently exhausted, frustrated, and question whether their work makes a difference, while continually feeling pressure to work a little harder, show more progress, and justify the value of their work. For those paid workers who work alongside volunteers, the pressure to take on extra volunteer hours themselves, as well as provide adequate training and support for the volunteers who may require much energy — as they need also to be listened to, encouraged, guided, and appreciated — may create a whole other set of demands.

Women working in literacy bear witness to the violence in learners' lives. Sometimes they also experience an increased threat of violence in their own lives because of their role creating a safer space for literacy learning. Many literacy workers feel they have little option but to hear disclosures of violence when learners ask. Whether workers are experienced at setting boundaries or not, there is a cost to themselves and a limit to what else they can take on in their lives as a consequence of their work in literacy. The day-to-day violence in some programs, and the level of anger vented upon workers, is experienced as toxic. In other programs, workers may be less aware of what causes the exhaustion they feel at the end of the day. Workers deal with witnessing pain through disclosures and through observing learners' lives. They also frequently struggle with feeling what they offer is inadequate. Frequently literacy workers spoke about how rarely the many dimensions of issues of violence were discussed in their programs or local networks. Yet even the possibility of taking up these issues in networks and programs will create more work for literacy workers themselves. Workers need a wide variety of places to talk to address these issues. They need peer support and supervision and far greater recognition of the cost of the work they do. They need support and encouragement to recognize their own needs and to look after themselves carefully.

Conclusion

This research challenges the literacy field to break the silences about violence in a myriad of ways. We must create new curriculum and discover new ways of working that normalize the challenges many literacy learners bring to their learning. We must recognize the complexity of many of the demands made in literacy work, provide innovative supports for learners to explore control, connection, and meaning, and learn to set goals and imagine possible change in their lives. Holistic programming may offer innovative ways forward. Links between literacy organizations and organizations offering counseling could support learners' access to counseling and the creation of new program models that do not exclude issues of trauma from learning. Workers need a variety of supports if they are to nurture themselves, work supportively with learners, create new options for programming and repeatedly break the silence about the violence in women's lives, and make the links between the aftermath of trauma and difficulties with learning.

Endnotes

[1] The research was funded by the National Literacy Secretariat, Human Resources Development, Canada, and sponsored by the Canadian Congress for Learning Opportunities for Women (CCLOW).

[2] The Badgley Report (1984) concluded "approximately 54 percent of the females under the age of 18 have been sexually assaulted. The definition of sexual assault here is sexual activity ranging from unwanted touching and threats of unwanted touching to rape causing bodily harm." Badgley also showed that about 31 percent of the males of all ages have been sexually assaulted. The majority of these males were under 21 when the first assault took place. (Mitchell, 1985:88). Statistics Canada figures (1993) state that "51 percent of Canadian women have experienced at least one incident of physical or sexual violence (as defined by the Criminal Code of Canada) since the age of 16. Twenty-five percent of all women have experienced physical or sexual violence at the hands of a marital or common-law partner."

[3] These concepts were articulated by Tanya Lewis as part of her thesis defense. I thank her for the tremendous insight of such metaphors for enabling a vision of something outside the all-pervasive imagery of a journey towards health.

Notes

In this short paper I cannot list the names of the many people who spent time talking to me or all the people who supported the process. I can only offer a collective thank you to the many people who are part of this work. Many people contributed their wisdom to the process that brought together the ideas and analysis on these pages.

"But I'm Not a Therapist: Furthering Discussion about Literacy Work with Survivors of Trauma" introduces these research findings in more detail. It is available at www.jennyhorsman.com along with information on the book *Too Scared to Learn*, which explores the findings in depth. (For more information contact the author: feedback@jennyhorsman.com.)

References

Herman, Judith. *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence — From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror.* New York: Basic Books, 1992.

Mitchell, A. "Child Sexual Assault." In *No Safe Place: Violence Against Women and Children.* Guberman, Connie and Margie Wolfe. (Eds.) Toronto, Ontario: Women's Press, 1985.

A Step by Step Description of the Collage Process

(From Getting Ready to Work, Vermont Adult Learning)

We planned two sessions devoted to teaching participants basic collage techniques. Afterwards, each session was to begin with a silent meditation for centering and then the creation of a collage was to be done in silence. As a closing, individuals would be asked to share their collage and any comments with the group. Group members were not to analyze or criticize each other's work. Only the artist herself was to comment on the meaning.

At the first class Joan taught the actual step-by-step process. Each participant was able to complete a collage in the two-hour class. Some special materials were required and a list of those follows.

1. Get some magazines

Take a stack of magazines and tear or cut out any images that attract your eye. No words are allowed and don't stop to read any articles. Tip: Images from magazines with glossy, heavier weight papers are easier to handle and therefore work better. Lighter weight papers, of course, can be used. However, when the glue is applied, the paper often rolls up, and can wrinkle or rip easily.

2. Choose and cut your images

Once you have collected a pile of images, look through them and select ones you would like to use. Tear or cut as desired. For very fine or small images use an X-acto knife for better success with detail.

3. Play with arranging the images

Experiment with arranging the images on the support paper, combining, overlapping, joining, whatever. To avoid a problem with lines from layered images showing through when glued, cut the underneath images so that edges meet the abutting image. You may be more satisfied with the finished product.

4. Plan the gluing order and final touches

After the images are cut and arranged to your satisfaction, plan the gluing order. Mark guide points as needed for correct placement.

5. Set up your gluing workspace

Tape down the edges of your support paper so that it will not move as you work. You need two containers: one for water for the roller and one for matte medium. Tape down a piece of plastic coated freezer paper beside your piece. The coating on the freezer paper permits repeated, easy cleaning after each application of glue, as well as protecting your table surface.

6. Glue down the images

Glue each image by completely brushing the back with matte finish. Then, lay it down in place on the support paper smoothing from the center of the image outward to the edge.

Use the roller to flatten the image in place, proceeding carefully to eliminate wrinkles and air bubbles. Once an image is down, it is almost impossible to change its position by relifting.

Replace roller into water.

After gluing down each image, wipe across it with a damp rag to clear any surplus matte from the surface, and clean the freezer paper of any remaining matte medium.

Repeat this process image by image.

7. Add the final touches

When the collage is completed, add closing touches such as your name and, if you wish, a title of the piece. Gold or silver pens are very attractive. This step can also be done later, after the collage is dry.

8. Final brush with matte medium

Brush the entire surface with the matte medium as a final protective coating. Let it dry in a safe place.

Collage supplies, from left to right: a brayer, x-acto knife, pen, brush, and scissors on top of support paper with a bottle of matte medium and a stack of great magazines.

Collage Supplies

Below is a list of supplies and materials that are often used in collage making. You can certainly make meaningful collages with no more than scissors, magazines, a gluestick, and your chosen support paper. The materials listed below are what we used in class.

Acrylic medium – Joan Burch recommends Golden or Liquitex matte medium to coat the supports, adhere the images, and provide a final protective coating to the work.

Brayer – A soft rubber Speedball brayer or roller will work.

Brushes – Expensive ones are not necessary. Stubby, colored handled bristle brushes cost about a dollar at an art supply store.

Containers – Several are needed: for water for brushes, brayer, clean-up cloth, and to hold the medium you are currently using, not contaminating your basic supply. (Cottage cheese containers work great.)

Cutting mats – Green mats with measured lines are sold in art or office supply stores. They come in various sizes. Use with your X-acto knife.

Cutting tools –

Scissors – Any good quality, small, sharp-pointed scissors work well.

X-acto knife – The small one (#11 classic blades) work well.

Freezer paper – This provides an easy-to-keep clean work surface.

Newspapers – Use to help protect your work surface.

Rulers – A clear ruler or triangle will help you trim edges and make square corners. A metal, flexible stainless steel rule with a nonskid cork back is great for inking edges of your finished work.

Paper towels – Also needed is a small clean cloth.

Pencils – Sometimes permanent colored pencils or markers are used to touch up edges of cut pieces. Pilot Gold and Silver markers can be used to outline finished work.

Supports – These are the surfaces to which you attach the images. We used black Stonehenge cover paper in class. Be sure to coat it with matte medium (and let it dry) before you start to glue down your work. Using a black support paper prevents words from the opposite side of the paper showing through your image.

Tape – Scotch drafting tape is an easily removable masking tape for taping down the support paper. Scotch removable clear tape can be used to keep pieces in place while deciding on a layout. This tape has the tackiness of a Post-It.

Tengo flores hoy

Community Education Project
Native Language Literacy Group II (GLE 2-5.9)
Domestic Violence Project

The Process

The process used is described in Chapter 3 (see page 131). Yolanda Robles shared the idea of writing a short play based on "Tengo flores hoy" at the end of the discussion of the poem. During the next several weeks each Thursday was spent developing the script for the play, then rehearsing and revising the play until everyone agreed with the final product. During this process different students began to assume different roles in the play, and the group also decided to include a performance of several Spanish-language songs related to the themes of family and relationship violence between segments of the presentation. One group member knew a local musician who agreed to provide guitar accompaniment to the various performers.

The group's presentation was made in the following sequence:

1. Introduction of the learners and the play—Yolanda
2. Reading of the "Tengo flores hoy" poem—Carmen
3. Song: "Rómpeme mátame"—Doris
4. Facts about domestic violence—Margarita and Luis
5. Scene I
6. Song: "Basta ya"—Olga Iris
7. Scenes II and III
8. Song: "Perdóname Señor"—Martin/Doris
9. Remarks about Violence against Women—Carmen Nieves of Womanshelter/Compañeras

The Community Education Project

Presenta

Una obra sobre la violencia doméstica:

Tengo flores hoy

Desarrollada y actuada por los estudiantes de la clase
de Español Grupo II

The Poem

Tengo flores hoy

Author Unknown

Tengo flores hoy,
No era mi cumpleaños ni ningún día especial.
Tuvimos nuestra primera discusión la noche pasada.
Me dijo muchas cosas crueles que de verdad me hirieron.
Yo sé que él está arrepentido y no quizo decir todas esas
Cosas que dijo, porque me envió flores hoy.

Tengo flores hoy,
No era nuestra aniversario ni ningún día especial.
La noche pasada me tiró contra la pared y empezó a ahorcarme.
Fue como una pesadilla, no pude creer que fuera real.
Me levanté en la mañana con golpes y moretones en todas partes.
Yo sé que él está arrepentido porque me envió flores hoy.

Ya yo tengo flores otra vez,
No era día de las madres ni otro día especial.
La noche pasada me golpeó otra vez, y fue peor que las otras veces.
¿Si lo dejo, que yo haría? ¿Cómo cuidaría a mis hijos?
¿Cómo obtendré dinero? Tengo miedo de él. Tengo miedo de dejarlo,
porque sé que él está arrepentido.

Tengo flores hoy.
Hoy es un día muy especial, hoy es el día de mi funeral.
La noche pasada finalmente me mató. Me golpeó hasta matarme.
Si yo hubiera tenido suficiente coraje para dejarlo,
No hubiera tenido flores hoy.

Today I Have Flowers

Today I have flowers
it wasn't my birthday, it wasn't a special occasion
last night we had our first argument
he said many cruel things that truly hurt me
I know that he is sorry and that he didn't really mean to say
those things to me because today he sent me flowers.

Today I have flowers
it wasn't our anniversary it wasn't a special occasion
last night he threw me against the wall and tried to choke me
I thought it was a nightmare I could not believe that it was real
when I woke up I had bruises and was black and blue all over
I know he's sorry because today he sent me flowers

Again I have flowers
It wasn't Mothers Day it wasn't a special occasion
last night he hit me again and it was worse than ever.
If I leave him what will I do? How will I take care of my children?
How can I get money? I'm afraid of him. I'm afraid to leave him,
but I know he's sorry.

Today I have flowers
It is a special day for me today. It is my funeral
Last night he finally killed me. He beat me until he killed me.
If I only would have had the courage to leave him,
today I would not have flowers.

"Today I Have Flowers" ("Tengo flores hoy" in Spanish) translated by Selenia Vazquez from The Care Center, Holyoke, MA.

The Play

Tengo flores hoy (Obra)

Escena 1: El esposo llega del trabajo.

Esposo: ¡Ya llegué! ¿Ya está la comida? ¡Tengo hambre!

Esposa: No, es que no he tenido tiempo de hacerla, fíjate que la nena se enfermó y no me ha dejado hacer nada.

Esposo: ¡Maldita sea! ¡Has estado todo el día en la casa vagueando, y yo vengo cansado del trabajo y muerto de hambre y tú me dices que pasastes el día cuidando la nena y no has tenido tiempo de tan siquiera de limpiar esta casa! Pedazo de puerca, cochina, apuesto que estuvistes todo el día viendo novelas, ¡no sirves para nada! ¡Hazme algo de comer, estúpida!

Esposa: Pero...

La esposa se va llorando, a la cocina a prepar la comida de el esposo.

Mas tarde......El esposo le trae flores a la esposa.

Esposo: Perdóname mi amor, sí, estoy arrepentido de haberte hablado como te hablé.

Escena 2: Otro día.

Esposa: Fíjate mi amor que mi amiga me invitó a una pequeña fiestecita en la casa de ella, solamente van a haber mujeres. ¿Tú crees que puedo ir?

Esposo: (*El se le queda mirando.*) ¿Pero quién tu te crees que yo soy, un estúpido? ¡No vas! ¡Seguramente ahí van a haber machos! Y tú lo que quieres es ir para estar chequeándolos. Y de seguro tus amigotas también te van a estar llenando la cabeza de estupideces

Esposa: Tú sabes que eso no es verdad, ella es una persona seria. Yo quiero ir. Yo nunca voy a ningún lado sola, ni tampoco me llevas a ningún sitio.

Esposo: ¡Cállate! (*Le da una boletada y otra y otra.*) ¡No me respondas! ¡Aquí el que manda soy YO! ¡Tú haces lo que yo diga!

Mas tarde......El esposo le trae flores a la esposa.

Esposo: Perdóname mi amor. ¡Es que me sofoqué! Tú sabes que lo que yo te digo es por tu bien. Los amigos no sirven.

Una amiga llega de visita a la esposa y la encuentra con golpes y moretones.

Amiga: ¡Dios mío! ¿Qué te pasó?

Esposa: La noche pasada me golpeó otra vez, y fue peor que las otras veces.

Amiga: ¡Tienes que buscar ayuda por favor! Ese hombre en una de estas te va a matar, por favor, hay grupos de apoyo, refugios y también puedes llamar a la policía.

Esposa: Si lo dejara, ¿qué yo haría? ¿Cómo cuidaría a mis hijos? ¿Cómo obtendré dinero? ¡TENGO MIEDO DE EL! ¡Tengo miedo de dejarlo! Pero, sé que él está arrepentido. Me trajo flores.

Escena 3: La amiga encuentra a otra en la calle.

Amiga #1: ¡Hola! Hace tiempo que no te veía. ¿Cómo estás?

Amiga #2: Muy triste. Acabo de enterrar a mi mejor amiga.

Amiga #1: ¿Qué pasó?

Amiga #2: La noche pasada, finalmente la mató. La golpeó hasta matarla. Si ella hubiese tenido el suficiente coraje para dejarlo, si yo la hubiese ayudado más...Hoy no hubiese tenido tantas flores en su funeral.

Cierra el Telón

Rómpeme mátame

por Gloribee

Tus ojos ya no me miran,
Son tus labios dos mentiras,
Tu lengua insulta y acaricia,
Pero así me siento viva.

Prefiero ser pura sangre,
Y me tires de la cima,
Una muñeca de carne,
Un adorno en tu vitrina.

Por eso rómpeme mátame, pero
No me llores, no mi vida.
Prefiero que tú me mates
Que morirme cada día.

Tus manos son dos cadenas,
Mi placer y mi agonía,
Con una me das cariño,
Con la otra me dominas.

Prefiero sentir la espuela
Que me hinca cada día,
A ser la flor que en un vaso
Olvidastes en una esquina.

Por eso rómpeme mátame, pero
No me llores, no mi vida.
Prefiero que tú me mates
Que morirme cada día.

Basta ya

por Marc Antonio Solís

Desde hoy,
He prohibido a mis ojos
El mirarte de nuevo a la cara.
Tienes algo que acaba conmigo,
Que a mi mente de mi alma separa.

Tengo que renunciar a quererte antes
Que ya no tengo remedio. Si
Mi vida dejara a tu suerte, mi camino será
Un cementerio.

¡Y basta ya!
De tu inocencia, de esta forma tan absurda.
De ver a diario como echas a la basura
mi corazón, lo que yo te doy,
con tanta fe de ver en ti felicidad.

Me llevaré
La dignidad de no caer más en tu juego.
Haré de todo mi interior nuevos senderos,
Y lloraré, hasta lograr, que algún día ya no
Te pueda recordar.

Castígame Señor

por Luis Gonzalez

Castígame Señor,
Sé muy bien que soy culpable,
Pués destrocé un corazón
Que no hacía daño a nadie.

Yo no puedo soportar,
Esta pena que me mata.
Sé que merezco morir
Para pagar yo mi falta.

Me quería con locura,
Yo era su equivocación,
Pués cuando llegaba tarde,
La encontraba en un sillón.

Esperando mi regreso,
Ella nunca se acostaba.
Y yo llegaba borracho,
Y siempre la maltrataba.

La maté de sufrimiento,
Sé que no tengo perdón.
Y por eso es que te pido,
Que me perdones Señor.

Yolanda carried out this project at a time when CEP was working on curriculum development, in particular building our capacity vis-à-vis assessment strategies, as part of the local Curriculum Frameworks process. Yolanda worked with other staff to develop a rubric for learner participation in the project as an assessment tool (see page 165). Because the Curriculum Frameworks project was particularly focused on writing, the rubric is also somewhat slanted toward assessing individual learners' written products. However, it also addresses participation in both group discussion on the theme of violence against women and participation in the theater presentation.

Tema: Lectura y Escritura ("Language Arts")[1]
Nivel: NLL II (GLE 2-5.9)

Tópico: Violencia Doméstica

Contribuido por: Yolanda Robles

Objetivos:

- Discutir y aprender sobre la violencia doméstica, un tema que nos afecta a todos
- Entender dónde en la comunidad una/o puede buscar ayuda con relación a la violencia doméstica
- Educar a nuestra familia y comunidad sobre este tema, a través de una obra de teatro presentada a la comunidad
- Seguir desarrollando nuestras destrezas de escritura por medio de este proceso

Curriculum Frameworks Strands and Standards Addressed:

Oral Communication:

- Escuchar con comprensión básica
- Responder a las preguntas y los pensamientos de otros
- Participar eficazmente en discusiones de la clase
- [Comunicar y educar en la comunidad sobre un tema de importancia a través de una obra de teatro]

Reading:

- Expresar pensamientos por escrito
- Responder a preguntas en oraciones completas
- Seguir adquiriendo estrategias de organización

---

[1] The Spanish-language version of this project plan (included in part here) was also included in *¡Fortalécete #3!*, the Holyoke JUNTOS Collaborative Native Language Literacy Working Group's FY01 NLL curriculum sourcebook.

Critical Thinking:

- Utilizar herramientas apropriadas para expresar ideas y opiniones
- Reconocer que no hay siempre una respuesta correcta
- Reconocer como el medio de comunicación afecta el mensaje

Tiempo: Una semana (una hora por día) de discusión inicial y escritura; después varias semanas en el desarrollo, ensayo, y presentación de la obra.

Proceso:

1. La maestra escribe en la pizarra, ¿Qué es Violencia Doméstica?
2. Hablamos de esta pregunta y otras relacionadas: ¿Quiénes están expuestos a la violencia doméstica? ¿Cómo podemos saber que somos víctimas de violencia doméstica? Así comezamos un diálogo informal sobre lo que el grupo entiende sobre la violencia doméstica. La maestra escucha sin interrumpir las opiniones del grupo, incluyendo si algunos voluntarios del grupo hablan sobre sus experiencias de violencia doméstica en sus vidas.
3. La maestra dará una pequeña lección sobre lo que es violencia doméstica, quienes están expuestos, como podemos saber que somos víctimas de la violencia doméstica, y cómo nuestra familia, amigos y comunidad se afectan con este comportamiento de violencia.
4. A nivel individual el grupo escribe una composición sobre violencia doméstica y posibles soluciones.
5. Se invita a una persona de la comunidad (un "shelter" u otra organización) para hablar sobre la violencia doméstica y los recursos que existen en la comunidad para ayudar.
6. Leemos y discutimos el poema "Tengo flores hoy." Hablamos sobre la idea de montar esta poesía en una obra.
7. Si a los estudiantes les gusta la idea y están de acuerdo, entre todos preparamos o escribimos un drama sobre la violencia doméstica. Se revisa varias veces el papel del drama hasta que todos estén de acuerdo con el producto final. Pedimos voluntarios para hacer el drama, ensayamos muchas veces, y al fin presentamos el drama a la comunidad.

Nota: El drama es voluntario; se puede escribir poesía también o hacer presentaciones sobre la violencia doméstica entre el grupo. De lo que se vaya a producir en esta lección depende del interés del estudiante.

Valoración: Utilizamos la rúbrica especial (presentada abajo) para valorar el trabajo de los estudiantes en este proyecto.

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Community Education Project—Rúbrica para Proyecto de Violencia Doméstica

Teacher: Yolanda Robles *Grupo:* NLL 2 (GLE 2-5) *Estudiante:* ____________ *Fecha:* ____________

Curriculum Framework Strands/Standards Addressed ▶	**Strand: Oral Communication** **Standards:** Escucha con comprensión básica; Responder apropiadamente a los pensamientos y preguntas de otros; Participar eficazmente en discusiones en la clase.	**Strand: Writing** **Standards:** Adquirir más estrategias de organización; Escribir más largamente con relación a un tema o pregunta.	**Strand: Writing** **Standards:** Adquirir más estratégias de información; Incluir detalles apropiados relacionados con los temas generales.	**Strand: Writing** **Standards:** Conciencia de reglas de gramática y mecánica; Empezar a reconocer sus propios errores; Revisar su propio trabajo con ayuda de otros.	**Strand: Critical Thinking** **Standards:** Utilizar herramientos apropiados para expresar ideas y opiniones; Reconocer que no hay siempre "una respuesta correcta"; Reconocer como el medio de comunicación afecta al mensaje.
Areas De Desempeño ▶ **Niveles de Desempeño ▼**	**Participación en discusiones sobre el tema de violencia domestica.**	**Producto Escrito: Organización**	**Producto Escrito: Elaboración**	**Producto Escrito: Mecánica**	**Participación en obra de teatro**
Proficiente	• Escucha activamente con consistencia • Ofrece una variedad de pensamientos e ideas que se relacionan con el tema • Demuestra capacidad de cambiar sus opiniones, y ayuda a otros a refleccionar sobre sus propias ideas	• Desarrollo claro de comienzo, medio, fin • Las ideas aparecen en una secuencia lógica • Transiciones suaves y lógicas	• Se apoyan todas las declaraciones generales con detalles claros y específicos • Todos los detalles incluidos apoyan o elaboran directamente a las declaraciones generales • La selección de palabras y oraciones ayuda en expresar exactamente lo que el autor quiere	• Oraciones generalmente correctas gramáticamente, y son variadas (y apropiadamente correctas) en estructura • Consistencia en uso de puntuación y ortografía correcta	• Demuestra mucho interés en el proyecto, y hace lo que puede para asegurar que sale bien • Se compromete a varias responsabilidades, cumple con sus compromisos, y ayuda a otras/os a cumplir con los suyos • Toma al proyecto en serio y se mantiene enfocada/o todo el tiempo
Desarrollandose	• Generalmente escucha, y a veces demuestra destrezas de escuchar activamente • Interrumpe a veces • Ofrece algunos pensamientos/ideas relacionados con el tema • A veces demuestra capacidad de cambiar sus opiniones	• Desarrolla algunas (pero no todas) partes del ensayo • Alguna desorganización de la sequencia de ideas • Pocos intentos de desarrollar transiciones eficazes	• Se apoya al menos una declaración general con detalles claros y específicas • Otros detalles salen de los puntos generales • Algunas palabras (vocabulario) y frases expresan significados exactos	• Oraciones generalmente sencillas en estructura pero gramáticamente correctas, o son complejas en estructura pero incluyen inconsistencias de gramática • Inconsistencia en uso correcto de puntuación y ortografía	• Demuestra interés en participar, aunque a veces hace al proceso más difícil • Se compromete a unas responsabilidades, y generalmente cumple con lo que se ha comprometido • Usualmente toma en serio el proyecto, aunque a veces sale de enfoque
Empezando	• No presta mucha atencion y/o interrumpe a otras personas • No ofrece muchos pensamientos o ideas • No está abierto a cambiar sus propias opiniones	• Poco desarrollo de comienzo, medio, fin • Falta una organización clara de ideas • No intenta de desarrollar transiciones eficazes	• No incluye detalles específicos, o los detalles incluidos no se relacionan con las declaraciones generales • Selección de vocabulario y frases no expresa exactamente lo que el autor quiere que expresen	• Oraciones incluyen errores de gramática a menudo • Inconsistencia en uso correcto de puntuación y ortografía	• No demuestra voluntad de participar, o participa en una manera negativa • No cumple con sus responsabilidades relacionadas con la obra • No toma al proyecto en serio, y casi siempre se desenfoca

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Examples of Poems Used by Programs

On the following pages are examples of poems that programs used. They also used many others that we have not reprinted including:

"Don't They Know" in *Psychic Unrest* by Lillian Allen (1999)

"Liberation" in *Women Do This Every Day* by Lillian Allen (1993)

"On the Continuing Struggle for Liberation" in *Eye to Eye — Women*
by Baird, Vanessa (Ed.) (1996)

"Phenomenal Women" in *The Complete Collected Poems*
by Maya Angelou (1994)

"The Relationship" in *Covering Rough Ground* by Kate Braid (1991)

"The Wrong Anger" in *The Moon is Always Female* by Marge Piercy (1999)

"Wild Geese" in *New and Selected Poems* by Oliver Mary (1992)

See Bibliography on Bringing the Whole Self to Learning, under Poetry (page 190).

Do not go to the garden of flowers!

by Kabir, translated by Rabindranath Tagore

बागों ना जा रे ना जा

baagon naa jaa re naa jaa
Do not go to the garden of flowers!
O friend! go not there;
In your body is the garden of flowers.
Take your seat on the thousand petals of the
lotus, and there gaze on the infinite beauty.

Kabir: Mystic Philosopher: 1398-1518. [online]. [cited 27 September 2002].
Available from World Wide Web: <htttp://www.cs.colostate.edu/~malaiya/kabir.html>. Used by permission.

You ask me…

by G. Sophie Harding

You ask who I am

I answer, I am a princess, a slave, mother of slaves, defender of the race,
I am everything and I am nothing, I am invisible and I am a visible
minority

You ask me where I live

I answer, I live among my ancestors, I live in Jamaica, I live in Canada,
I live in Africa, I live in the ocean… but I have no home

You ask me what's my name

I answer, I have been called many things, some which I care to forget
— the language that I speak in not my own, it doesn't celebrate who and
what I am

You say to me, "tell me about you"

I answer, do you have an hour, a day, or a lifetime? I have many
identities, many personalities, many viewpoints, many ambitions,
many hopes, many dreams. What I can't say in words I try to say without
words, what I can't touch with hands I try to touch with my soul,
what I don't understand with my mind I try to understand with my
heart, I am everything and I am nothing.

Harding, Sophie. (Ed.) *Our Words, Our Revolutions: Di/Verse Voices of Black Women, First Nations Women, and Women of Colour in Canada.* Toronto, Ontario: Inanna Publications and Education, 2000.

Sister Hold On

by Lillian Allen

Hold on sister
Sister hold on

I know times are tough tough tough
you work yuself to the bones to loose this rut
but Babylon system conspire to down you
remember your strength sister
remember your joys
remember you're whole sister
and you're not alone.

Hold on sister
Sister hold on

I know times are rough rough rough
seem like things jus' a get worst
some moments feel like a nuclear holocaust

Hold on sister
Sister hold on

I know you got struggles sister
right up to your eyes
just wishing the pressures could ease
signal a little relief in your life
but everytime you turn around
it's another barrier to break down

just hold on sister
sister hold on

Remember your strength sister
remember those passed
you've come this far sister
hold on

Allen, Lillian. *Women Do This Every Day*. Toronto, Ontario: Women's Press, 1993.

Each One of Us

by Rudy Didzena

Each one of us is a poet,
we express our failures and victories
through the unwritten language of poetry.

Each one of us is an artist,
we paint the landscape of our dreams
and hopes into colourful pictures
drawing our ideas into our lives, to better ourselves.

Each one of us is a sculptor,
we chip away the rough edges
in our lives and shape our senses
to carve them into a statue.

Each one of us is a novelist,
we write our emotional wounds on pages
in our hearts to heal so we may continue
our book of life.

Each one of us has a talent, an untouched
treasure, hidden within ourselves yet to explore.

Didzena, Rudy. *Each One of Us: A Collection of Writings and Art Work.* Edmonton, Alberta: Edmonton John Howard Society Literacy Publications, 1997.

Sample Materials on "Violence in Public Space"

The following materials came from "Violence in Public Space," which was part of a package we put together and used to explore the complexities of violence. (See Chapter 1 page 9.) They are excerpts that have been collected from various sources and are included here as examples of different print materials available. They reflect the "Assumptions about Violence" (Handout page 24), and can be used to illustrate that different forms of oppression and violence are intertwined. You may want to begin your own collection.

1. Police Record	The Difference Between Rape and Other Violence
2. Training Kit	The Role of Fear
3. Book	The Respite and Danger of an Urban Park
4. Cartoon	Non-Provocative Dressing
5. Cartoon	Chauffeurs — Class
6. Listserv	Date Rape
7. Poem	Lesbian Strength — Risk and Safety
8. Cartoon	Racism
9. Cartoon	Out Alone — Protection
10. Song	Disability and Self-Defense
11. Police Record	Blame and Disability
12. Cartoon	Blame and Judgement

Police Record: The Difference Between Rape and Other Violence

Under Conclusions Section:
Rape is unlike any other sort of injury incurred by accident or neglect. Survivors of rape must bear social stigmatization that accident victims do not. Rape is not about sex; it is about anger, it is about power, and it is about control. It is, in the words of Dr. Peter Jaffe, "an overwhelming life event." It is a form of violence intended to create terror, to dominate, to control, and to humiliate. It is an act of hostility and aggression. Forced sexual intercourse is inherently violent and profoundly degrading.

As Mr. Justice Cory stated in R. v. Osolin, [1993] 4 S.C.R. 595 at 669:
It cannot be forgotten that a sexual assault is very different from other assaults. It is true that it, like all the other forms of assault, is an act of violence. Yet it is something more than a simple act of violence. Sexual assault is in the vast majority of cases gender based. It is an assault upon human dignity and constitutes a denial of any concept of equality for women.

Public record: Jane Doe v. Toronto (Metropolitan) Commissioners of Police. 1998. [online].[cited 27 September 2002]. Available from World Wide Web: <http://qsilver.queensu.ca/law/restrict/emrich/law123/janedoe.htm>.

Training Kit: The Role of Fear

It is obvious that some forms of violence have greater physical or emotional impact than others. But we must never forget that all forms of violence against women contribute to the very real fear and suffering that women in our society endure. Three out of four women in your neighbourhood fear using public transport after dark; only two in five feel safe walking in their own neighbourhood at night. Basic rights that men enjoy are the source of fear for the majority of Canadian women.

The fear, though, is greater in women's own homes. A common myth is that most violence against women is committed by strangers. In fact, women are most at risk from men they know — husbands, boyfriends, fathers, dates, uncles, employers, and caregivers.

(All statistics from Statistics Canada "The Violence Against Women Survey," The Daily, Nov. 18, 1993, except this reference to sexual assault which is from House of Commons, "The War Against Women," Ottawa, 1991.)

In: *No Longer Silent: Taking a Stand Against Violence in our Communities, Our Workplaces and Our Homes.* [kit]. Toronto: Ontario Federation of Labor.

Book: The Respite and Danger of an Urban Park

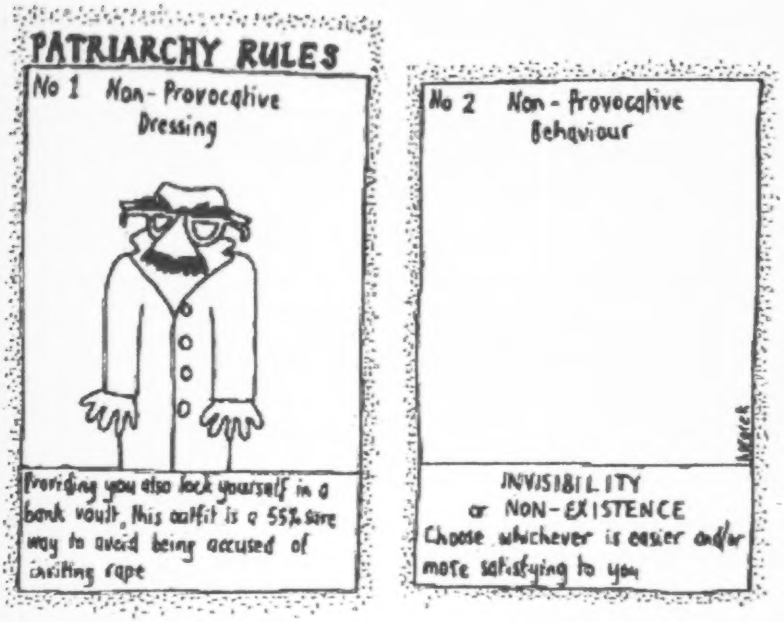
Alves was a regular jogger in Central Park, often beginning as early as four thirty in the morning in order to arrive on time for her job as a clerk in a shoe store. Her mother, when she arrived from Rio de Janeiro to claim her daughter's body, described Maria's early morning runs as "gaining strength from nature." My outrage at her murder registers first as blame. She should never have been in the park at that hour, I hear myself thinking. In fact, she should never have been murdered in the park.

The walls around Central Park define it as a protected place, a respite. Its existence speaks of a society that "gained strength from nature" even as it grew into a city, but I have always viewed the gates of Central Park with a Gothic apprehension. Cross here at your own risk, silly girl, they say, and the carriages and fountains and zoos for children seem a clever disguise papering over the real character of the urban park. This might just be the view of a midwesterner on the occasional visit. Nevertheless, it is a female grief that we enter the garden at our own peril.

Our feet are not bound, but we act either out of defiance or recklessness when we run the darkened path. Many of us learn to live without the relief of trees or a night walk when the snow is tumbling down. We are afraid or afraid of being afraid. When fear confined me to solitude in interior spaces, I began to lose access to a windy, open quality in my spirit. It is a female grief.

Francisco, Patricia. *Telling: A Memoir of Rape and Recovery*. New York: Cliff Street Books, 1999. For more excerpts from the book, information, and resources go to www.tellingofrape.com.

Cartoon: Non-Provocative Dressing


PATRIARCHY RULES
No 1 Non-Provocative Dressing
Providing you also lock yourself in a bank vault, this outfit is a 55% sure way to avoid being accused of inviting rape
No 2 Non-Provocative Behaviour
INVISIBILITY or NON-EXISTENCE
Choose whichever is easier and/or more satisfying to you
Horacek

by Judy Horacek

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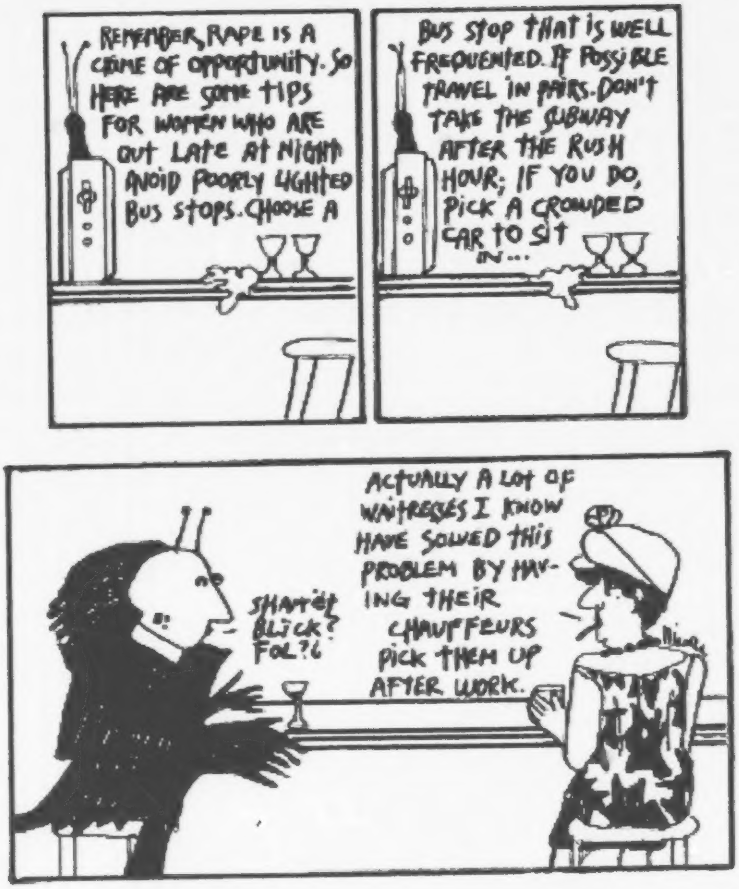
Horacek, Judy. *Life On The Edge*. North Melbourne, Australia: Spinifex Press, 1992, p. 50.

Cartoon: Chauffeurs — Class


REMEMBER, RAPE IS A CRIME OF OPPORTUNITY. SO HERE ARE SOME TIPS FOR WOMEN WHO ARE OUT LATE AT NIGHT. AVOID POORLY LIGHTED BUS STOPS. CHOOSE A
BUS STOP THAT IS WELL FREQUENTED. IF POSSIBLE TRAVEL IN PAIRS. DON'T TAKE THE SUBWAY AFTER THE RUSH HOUR; IF YOU DO, PICK A CROWDED CAR TO SIT IN...
ACTUALLY A LOT OF WAITRESSES I KNOW HAVE SOLVED THIS PROBLEM BY HAVING THEIR CHAUFFEURS PICK THEM UP AFTER WORK.
SHATTËL BLICK? FOL?6

by Nicole Hollander

Copyright 1981 by Nicole Hollander

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Listserv: Date Rape

UK may make date rape a lesser rape
From a listserv (July 1999):

Is it any less traumatic to be raped by someone you know than by a complete stranger? Date rape is the most common form of rape, but convictions in the UK are on the wane prompting the government to consider lighter sentences.

A Home Office report — "A Question of Evidence? Investigating and Prosecuting Rape in the 1990s" — found that the number of cases reported where the victim claimed to know their attacker was increasing. However, it also found that securing a conviction in such cases was particularly difficult: "Establishing a lack of consent can present evidential difficulties for the prosecution and court," said the report. It is thought that long jail terms put juries off convicting date rapists.

Should we differentiate?
The former Minister for Women Joan Ruddock said a change in the law was important because juries often saw date rape as a less serious offence: "I think it has to be looked at because at the moment only 60 percent of rape cases are actually resulting in a conviction and that is a very worrying fact." But Ruth Hall from Women against Rape argues that a grading system is not the answer: "Life can be shattered by the betrayal of trust when a man that you know and perhaps have loved actually turns around and rapes you." Could such a move improve women's safety or will it be letting sex offenders off lightly?

Poem: Lesbian Strength — Risk and Safety

lesbian strength

by Marg Yeo

[21 june, 1986, for annabel, who wanted to have a good time, and for dee, who put it into words]

i
i'am watching this woman
                                        she's a
dyke   that's clear
                              she's in a crowd
of dykes and she knows them   she has friends
there   when she reached out to touch them   they reach
back   they hug her   kiss her   rumple her hair   rest their
long arms across her shoulders   they hold her
close among them

just now   she leans her lips against
another woman's ear and speaks   low-voiced and
intimate   smiling   her friend tilts her head to
hear   they are siamese
twins   stitched together and walking as one
woman   they are both smiling   complicitly   the same
smile

i am still watching   and from
behind   a tall woman swoops and spins her
round   catches her up   lifts her clear
of the ground and plants a kiss
full on her mouth   for a moment they block
traffic till she comes slowly back to
earth   they twine fingers and loiter along
after the others

she is in danger

not perhaps at this second but
soon she will have to step out these
arms and enter the real
world again   nothing has
changed while she has been wrapped
up like this   there is still no
safe place for her
                              i wonder
how she can bear it
                                    and then her
eyes catch mine across the crowd

ii
who do you see?

i can't imagine that it's me   all sweat and scars and
blistered heels drifting along here

                                                of course
there's
danger   on the street tonight   the tube
tomorrow   in the classroom where i teach someone will
turn again and
spit in my face

but look   see this woman   see her
hand in mine   it's twice the
size of my little one   and look at her long
fingers   feel the splayed and toughened
tips   the muscle of her
palm   the gentleness she takes to build a
world with

sister
i call her   *lover* *friend*   she is the
choice i make without thinking   over and
over   she is repeated   with
variations   a thousand
times in my life   she is a poet
a carpenter   her novel
open my eyes   her music sings me to
sleep   her weaving
wraps me in

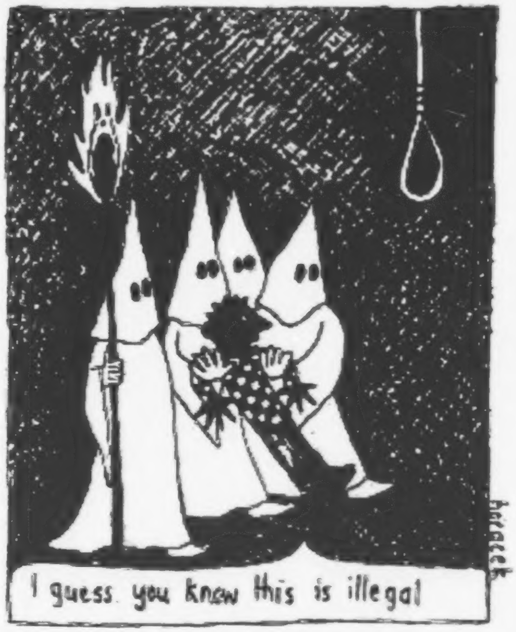
iii
there is no choice

see these women   they are
wise beyond words and strong
enough
            my
strength   my pride   my self
respect
          and all my
love

    24 june 1986

Yeo, Marg. In: *Getting Wise*. Charlottetown: Gynergy Books, 1990, p. 12–14.

Cartoon: Racism

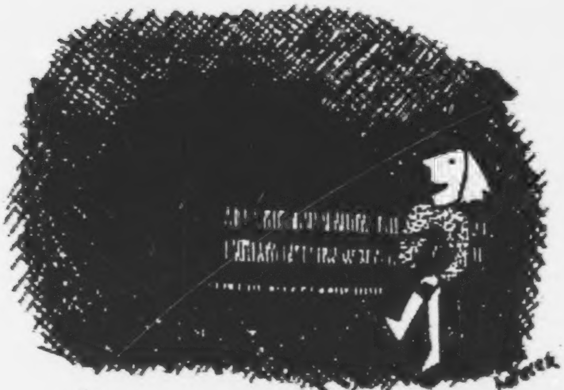


I guess you know this is illegal

by Judy Horacek

Horacek, Judy. *Life On The Edge*. North Melbourne, Australia: Spinifex Press, 1992, p. 26.

Cartoon: Out Alone — Protection



'Aren't you scared being alone?' said a sleazy voice from the bushes. 'Being alone is what I want' she replied, reaching into her handbag for her new improved vaporising gun.

by Judy Horaček

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Horacek, Judy. *Life On The Edge.* North Melbourne, Australia: Spinifex Press, 1992, p. 14.

Song: Disability and Self-Defense

A Cautionary Tale
or Aren't you glad that you know Wen-Do?

by Jane Field

Chorus:
Aren't you glad that you know Wen-Do?
Aren't you glad that you know that
You've got the power, you've got the will
You can defend yourself, 'cause you've got the skill
Wen-Do, Wen-Do
Aren't you glad that you know Wen-Do?

Well, I was rolling down the street one day feeling pretty good
when a man came up behind me and said,
"Hey honey — give me all your cash, give me what you've got."
And I said, "Hey I don't want trouble — you want my money? Here, you've
got it, just go away now."
But he said, "That's not all you know, no that won't do — there's something
else I want from you."
And I said, "Why sure, I'll give you something else. You want my
wheelchair? my crutches? Here take them. God knows I never really
wanted them anyway. Here you go."
But he said, "You know that's not what I mean little lady. You just back up
in this alleyway here and I'll show you what I mean."
He said, I'll be doing you a favour."
Well this was when I knew I'd done all the verbal reasoning I was going to
do and little did this guy know that he was up against: Wen-Do.
So, I looked him right in the eye and I yelled "HUT."
And he took a step back.
I wheeled right on up to him and I reached out and grabbed him by the neck.

Well he wasn't expecting that, I don't think.
I pulled him down to my level and let fly a zipper punch to his nose, a
hammer fist to his collarbone and an eagle's claw to his eyes for good measure.

Well that was all pretty soft stuff, so I used a knife hand to his throat and a
Wen-Do fist to his abdomen and he dropped to the ground.
I saw I was about done, so I wheeled on down the street and dialled 911 (for him).

From the album *The Fishing Is Free* by Jane Field. Hedgehog Songs. Used by permission.
(Jane Field, 39 Parliament St., #514 Toronto, Ontario M5A 4R2. E-mail: jane.and.hil@sympatco.ca.)

Police Record: Blame and Disability

Under Overview Section:
victim could neither hear nor speak; C.I.B. officer assigned because of ability to "sign" began by saying he did not believe the victim and refused to sign saying she (the victim) could lip read well enough; cautioned her with public mischief charge; accused her of having intercourse with a boyfriend and reporting sexual assault

judgments and comments about her demeanour "did not appear to be upset at all"; disbelief of her report.

comments about the victim's behaviour i.e. she drinks to the point of oblivion; inconsistencies in report indicating victim not assaulted — disbelief of victim.

opinion of officer — "it would appear to me from talking to her, this young man is only fulfilling a fantasy of hers."

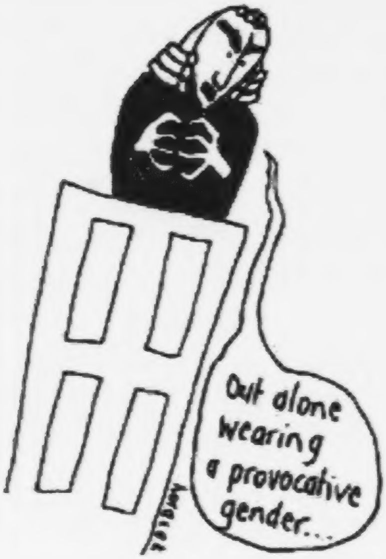
doctor not spoken to and forensic opinions ignored — all evidence consistent with victim's report, none inconsistent; victim cautioned with public mischief and advised to take polygraph; although hysterical and sobbing every time officer spoke to her, this was an act "put on."

Under Conclusions Section:
I am compelled however, to conclude that the only difference between the Annex Rapist investigation and this investigation was the level of violence in addition to the rape itself. Dawson Davidson also physically beat many of his victims in addition to sexually assaulting them.

As this is the only real distinguishing factor between the two investigations I must conclude that it was this factor — the lack of additional violence — which resulted in this investigation being essentially on the back burner insofar as resources were concerned. The sense of urgency which drove the Dawson Davidson investigation was markedly absent from this investigation. I can only conclude because Callow's victims were "merely raped" by a "gentleman rapist" — according to the Oliver Zink Rape Cookbook definition — this case did not have the urgency of the other.

Public record: Jane Doe v. Toronto (Metropolitan) Commissioners of Police. 1998. [online]. [cited 27 September 2002]. Available from World Wide Web: <http://qsilver.queensu.ca/law/restrict/emrich/law123/janedoe.htm>.

Cartoon: Blame and Judgement


Out alone wearing a provocative gender...
Horacek

by Judy Horacek

Horacek, Judy. *Life On The Edge*. North Melbourne, Australia: Spinifex Press, 1992, p. 14.

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Founded in 1951 to meet the needs of the educationally disadvantaged, World Education, Inc. is a nonprofit organization providing training and technical assistance in nonformal education.

In addition to strengthening literacy and adult basic education in the United States, World Education has worked in more than 50 countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Internationally, it has been involved in such areas as environmental education, maternal and child health, community and small enterprise development, HIV/AIDS education and prevention, integrated literacy, and education for the workplace.

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Even Start LINKS
(Learning... Innovation... Nurturing...
Knowledge... Success)
Franklin County Adult Basic Education
Farmington, Maine
Janice Armstrong and Janet Smith

Even Start LINKS is a family literacy program that serves 15 most-in-need families who have at least one child under the age of eight. Franklin County is primarily rural and located in west central Maine. Farmington is the largest town in the county with a population of 8,000.

Almost all the families that we serve are isolated without adequate transportation. LINKS is primarily a home-visiting program. We also collaborate with numerous other agencies in the community. Teachers travel lonely back roads in unpopulated wooded areas to be at each home for one to two hours a week. One day a week, LINKS uses the building of one of its partners, Early Head Start, located north of Farmington, for teachers to bring families together for a Learning Center Day. Even Start LINKS has joined with Early Head Start and Growing Healthy Families in a collaboration, called Early Care and Education Alliance, to provide seamless home visiting services to Franklin County.

Franklin County Adult Basic Education (ABE) is located on Main Street in Farmington. The tiny office is a room that contains a parent and children's library, as well as a computer and a long table for meetings. Colorful flags made by families hang on the wall, along with photographs of program participants with staff and with Mary Herman, First Lady of Maine and Chairperson of the Maine Family Literacy Task Force.

The LINKS staff consists of Janice Armstrong, Project Coordinator; Janet Smith, Adult Educator; Chee Rothschild, Early Childhood Educator; and Kim Roberts, AmeriCorp VISTA. The teachers, Janet and Chee, use a team approach to provide and integrate adult education, early childhood education, and parenting services. Adult Basic Education classes supplement LINKS adult education services for parents who have transportation. The Franklin County Children's Task Force offers parenting skills. Head Start, Early Head Start, and Child Development Services provide early childhood education.

LINKS offers a monthly socialization program called Families for Peace in collaboration with an elementary school in Farmington. The program brings together LINKS and Kindergarten families for a meal and to be with a Maine artist, storyteller, musician, or bookmaker to explore topics such as bullying and teasing, conflict resolution, cooperation, and tolerance.

York School
York Correctional Institution
Niantic, Connecticut
Kim McCaughey and Leslie Ridgway

York Correctional Institution (YCI), Connecticut's maximum-security female prison is located in the shoreline community of Niantic. The majority of the approximately 1,300 residents are African-Americans and Hispanics who come largely from the state's cities. Most are incarcerated for crimes related to drug use. Their length of stay varies from one day to life.

Behind the walls of York Correctional Institution is York School. The staff must enter the prison then go through seven other doors to reach the school section of the prison. York School offers adult education services in basic literacy, adult basic education (ABE), general education diploma (GED), vocational education classes, English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), special education, and college courses.

The school has a 32-member staff. In addition to the nine academic teachers, the school staff includes a librarian, pupil service counselors, administrators, administrative assistants, correctional officers, and part-time transitional counselors. The school operates year-round, serves approximately 400 students daily, ranging in age from 15 to 60. Classes run from 8 A.M. to 11 A.M. and 12:15 P.M. to 3 P.M. College classes and other special programs are conducted in the evenings. Anyone who wants to attend the school is eligible provided they have not been "disciplined" for 90 days. The school's mission is to "provide a positive learning environment for all students that promotes lifelong learning through academic, vocational, life skills, and college programming." To a large degree, the school fulfills its mission.

In the spring of 1999 the prison experienced a rash of suicide attempts. Two of these attempts resulted in death. In response to these tragedies, the school sponsored a series of workshops (music, art, and creative writing) to promote healing. At the same time a group of teachers formed a committee to address women's health issues. One of the final topics addressed by this year-long effort was violence against women. Around the same time as two York School staff members — Leslie Ridgway and Kim McCaughey — became part of the Women, Violence, and Adult Education project, one teacher became a Creative Writing Consultant. With similar interests, they worked together to form a writing group for the women in the prison to address the implications of violence on learning.

The Genesis Center
Providence, Rhode Island
Gloria Caprio, Nancy Fritz,
Bernice Morris, and Michele Rajotte

The Genesis Center is a community-based school and support center for immigrants and refugees located in the West End of Providence, Rhode Island. Our mission is to join with the community to provide education, training, and services for families of many cultures to attain self-sufficiency and gain a full community voice.

We serve approximately 500 adult students per year in our daytime, evening, and worksite classes. We also have an Early Childhood Education Center on-site that cares for some 70 children each year. The Genesis Center offers English as a Second Language classes, computer instruction, food service, and teacher assistant training, as well as health and substance abuse prevention.

The Genesis School was founded in 1982 to assist a new group of refugees, the survivors of the years of war in Southeast Asia. The program focused on teaching English and survival skills, particularly for Southeast Asian women in the community. By 1986, the demographics of the area were beginning to change and Hispanic students began to attend Genesis. Over the years, Genesis became increasingly multicultural. At present, the population at Genesis is approximately 70 percent Hispanic, 11 percent Asian, and 18 percent Black or African. The 2001 student group included students from 26 different countries. A significant proportion (65 percent) of daytime students are welfare recipients who come to classes to learn English. The population is 75 percent women during the day.

The heart of The Genesis Center is its daytime program serving approximately 100 students in five levels of English instruction. Students attend classes five days a week for five hours per day (except Friday, which is a half-day).

Staff at the Genesis Center have experimented with a number of innovative programs over the years: a Peer Tutor Program, a Peer Health Educator Program, and Intergenerational Literacy have all become integral parts of the curriculum. This year, the Women, Violence, and Adult Education team initiated a Women's Quilting and Conversation group that met two afternoons a week from October through June.

Community Education Project
Holyoke, Massachusetts
Maria Salgado

The Community Education Project (CEP) is in the city of Holyoke, in the Western part of Massachusetts. CEP is a small nonprofit community-based organization that provides adult basic education with a focus on Native Language Literacy and ESOL. The group that participated in the WVAE project was composed of current and former learners from CEP. This learning group of Latina women named themselves "Mujeres del Nuevo Amanezer" (Women of the New Dawn).

Holyoke was one of the first "model" cities during the industrial revolution and therefore many factories were created alongside our canals. Many of those mills and factories have moved south or have closed. As a result, there is a high level of unemployment in the city.

Forty thousand people are estimated to live in Holyoke, and Latinos make up a third of that total, representing the largest minority group.

Latinas are struggling with many pressures including those of welfare reform. Often many of our learners are pushed to stop learning and forced to take low-paying jobs in order to escape pressure from caseworkers. This situation leaves them vulnerable to living in cycles of violence.

Our group has explored the reasons why violence continues to be prevalent in our community as well as in our society. The women meet once a week to read poetry as well as write or draw about their feelings pertaining to violence. One of the unique things about the group is the age span of the women: the youngest is 23 and the oldest is 64; their stories of violence bring them all together. The younger women who may currently be living with abusive partners draw courage from the older women and want to avoid repeating the cycle with their own daughters.

The best learning happens as we drink our morning coffee. This is where the debates take place, where we discuss the headlines and news in the community.

It has been an honor working with this group of women from our community around the issue of violence. We learn not just with a textbook or an exam, but from some incredible survivors who have much to say.

Project Hope
Adult Learners' Program
Dorchester, Massachusetts
Char Caver and Anna Yangco

Former shelter residents at Project Hope founded the Adult Learners' Program in 1990 to meet the needs of women like themselves. They knew from their life experience that education was one of the essential keys they needed to open doors to a more economically secure future for themselves and their families. Our program works on the principle that education is an act of justice and a process of empowerment. Adult learners have a high degree of input in shaping policies, course content, and evaluations. We encourage women to participate at all levels of the program, so that they will own their learning experiences and build their self-esteem through positive interactions.

The Adult Learners' Program assists 20 to 30 homeless, formerly homeless, and women at risk of becoming homeless, to attain their general education diploma (GED). Funded by the Department of Education, we teach basic literacy skills, health education, and computer training needed to obtain employment. Meeting on the first floor at round tables, teachers, tutors, and students collaborate on program design and development so that the women can take ownership of their learning. Recently, learners and teachers redesigned and transformed our area into a beautiful learning space.

The shelter at Project Hope has existed since the early 1980s when homelessness was a growing problem. The Little Sisters of the Assumption, who had been servicing the Dorchester area for over 30 years, decided to open up their own convent and invited homeless families to live with them. The sisters continued to work in the community every day and at night returned home to what had become one of the first neighborhood-based shelters in the state of Massachusetts.

Project Hope also includes

- a licensed Children's Center that provides care for 26 children, ages one month to six years;
- a Food Pantry that provides groceries to approximately 160 families each month;
- an Emergency Shelter with a full-time housing advocate that houses eight women and their children on the third floor of the convent;
- follow-up to assist families once they find permanent housing in the community; and
- community organizing with residents and agencies to address concerns such as welfare issues, neighborhood safety, and voter registration.

Their First Steps

The ways programs started fell into three broad categories:

1. A staff retreat/planning group
2. A survey of students and/or community
3. A transformation of physical working environment

We have included one example of each.

Staff Retreat/Planning Group

Getting Ready to Work, Vermont Adult Learning

After attending the Women, Violence, and Adult Education (WVAE) Institute, Tammy Stockman knew how she wanted to include addressing the impact of violence into the work of coordinating a conference she had been hired to do. In order to get the support of the umbrella organization, Vermont Adult Learning and administrators, the Getting Ready to Work staff not only addressed the issue of violence in their conference but also presented to the statewide coordinators. Once they had support, they held a retreat to plan their work.

Preliminary Networking

During the spring of the initial Women, Violence, and Adult Education Institute, our office developed a conference for Getting Ready to Work participants around the state. We hired Tammy Stockman to coordinate the conference and provided funding for her to attend relevant conferences as a training experience.

When Tammy saw the flyer for the first WVAE Institute, she knew she had to go. Tammy returned with a conviction that she wanted to continue to be a part of the project and with a clear direction for her work on the conference.

Making Connections

Organizing the state-wide conference, called the Time for Me conference, supported and benefited our decision to join the WVAE research project in three ways:

1. We identified state and local resources for women. We had a staff member actively networking with state and local resources for women. Several of the women who offered workshops at the conference later joined the study circle.
2. We learned from women participants about their needs. Women from across the state provided ideas for the conference agenda, including issues like a livable wage, children, career development, and, most importantly, stress.
3. Violence was named as a common denominator in women's lives, with significant impact on our participants.

Following the conference, we asked participants from around the state to complete a conference evaluation that included questions about violence:

a. Have you experienced violence of any kind (physical, emotional, sexual, prejudice, etc.) that has affected your success in education and work?

b. What would make Getting Ready to Work or any educational experience a safe place to learn?

The results confirmed the prevalence of violence in the lives of our participants and many staff members and offered helpful program directions.

Talking about Violence Statewide

We took these results to the coordinator of the Getting Ready to Work program at the Department of Education and asked to be on the agenda of the next statewide coordinators' meeting. We met to design a workshop that would explore what counts as violence and to discuss how violence affects our participants, our programs, and us personally. The issue of violence was "hot" for every single staff person around the table. Why had we never discussed such a pertinent and complex issue?

Although we only had a half hour for the workshop, some incredibly significant issues were quickly identified.

How does violence affect our participants?
Violence can affect their options, success, safety, ability to retain jobs, readiness to learn, willingness to work, parenting, health (physical, emotional, spiritual), problem solving, judgment, creativity, boundaries, focus. It can cause them to be violent with others; worry about their kids; fear losing a relationship; feel helpless, insecure, and isolated.

How does violence affect our program?
Violence in women's lives can affect their attendance, focus, safety, degree of "presence," productivity, learning, boundaries, bonding, creativity, health. It can disrupt teaching, cause students to leave the program, and raise confidentiality issues. It can also cause isolation, fear, and anger.

How does violence affect staff?
Violence can affect our safety, stress level, and the amount of time we spend planning versus doing therapy. It may cause us to play protector roles. It affects power dynamics. It affects how we perceive and relate to our participants: we may get frustrated, resent the time they take, feel ineffective.

The Staff Retreat

Following the first WVAE training, our staff retreated to a comfortable cottage on a lake in Fairlee, Vermont, to plan our fall program. We hoped to address violence within our program in a manner that would facilitate our participants' growth and healing. Leslie Weed-Fonner, a social worker/therapist with years of experience working with domestic violence, development, and trauma, participated in the day as a mentor-advisor. Her help was invaluable.

We began with a study of Jenny Horsman's paper, "But I'm Not a Therapist: The Challenge of Creating Effective Literacy Learning for Survivors of Trauma." (See Resources page 145.) At the end of the discussion, we developed nine guiding values for our Well-Being Group that incorporated what we had learned.

Nine Values for the Well-Being Group

1. Include the whole body: mind, body, spirit, and emotions.
2. Identify and value the skills and the sixth senses that people develop as a result of traumatic experiences. Can those same skills that lead to feeling out of control be used to feel in control?
3. Debunk and demystify pathological terms commonly used to describe trauma survivors, such as hypersensitive.
4. Honor the whole person.
5. Encourage "living beside" versus leaving behind life experiences. Too often survivors hear that they should "just get over it and go on with their lives."
6. Make a distinction between who you are, things you've done, and things that happened to you.
7. When setting goals, work gently and without judging.
8. Explain trauma to people. Talk about it. Externalize it. What is it? What is it like? How does it change us?
9. Ask lots of questions because trauma affects control, meaning, and connection so profoundly. We've noticed in our participants a loss of meaning, a different understanding of the meanings of words, and the ways in which words have sometimes gained meaning or had their meanings twisted as a result of experiences.

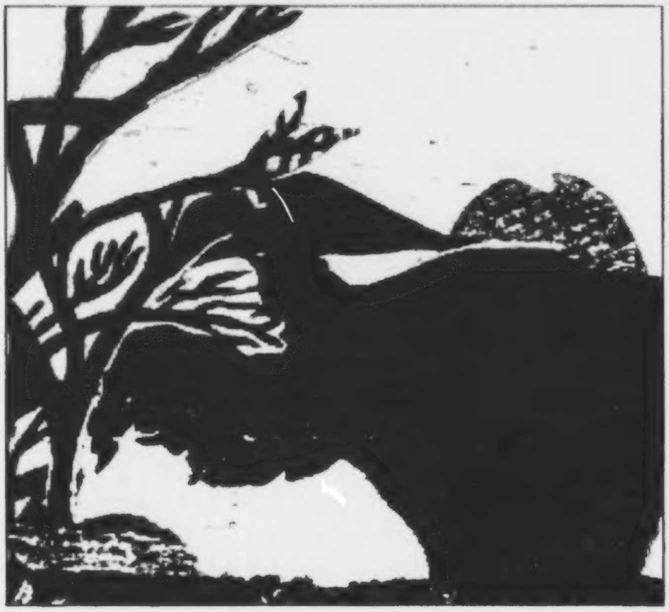
We also articulated our concerns about addressing violence:

- Addressing violence in our program identified us as a place to come for help and could be inviting trouble.
- We already have too much to do and it's not the purpose of welfare-to-work training.

Referring participants to community mental health services was not a viable option since there is limited availability in our local area, and it's difficult to get appointments.

Leslie offered to be available to us for supervision as we proceeded. She suggested that malpractice would probably make the idea of on-site counseling prohibitively expensive. Furthermore, Leslie suggested that the group provided a perfect context for working on trauma and healing. Very often poverty and trauma combine to silence women.

Because the focus of a program often defines its outcomes, instead of focusing on violence and trauma, we decided to focus on wellness. We needed no further evidence or proof that our participants had multiple experiences of trauma and violence. Did they also have ideas and experiences of wellness — what it is, what moments of wellness feel like, what it would be like to live well — and words that describe it? How do they experience and name the barriers that keep them from wellness? How do those barriers affect learning, parenting, working?



Collage created by workshop participant on visualizing a place of "well-being"

Survey of Students and Community

Community Education Project

One of the first steps Maria took was to send a letter and a questionnaire to people in her community. Though doing a survey may be an obvious, and very effective, route to increase awareness and gather support, it may not be the easiest one. For a mailed survey you can only expect about a 10 percent response rate, so think about how you will get responses if you do a survey and how this will influence your design and the way you implement it. For example, programs have given survey questions to colleagues after a meeting so they can collect the responses, though here there may be a concern about privacy, so the design must include the option of staying anonymous, such as having boxes to check rather than requiring written responses. We include Maria's work as an example because of the tone of the letter and openness of the survey questions.

Dear ______,

I hope you're enjoying your summer thus far. My name is Maria Salgado, and I am the Counselor/Special Projects Coordinator for the Community Education Project (CEP). As you may know, CEP is a small program offering Native Language Literacy and ESOL programming, along with special projects promoting community involvement and change on our learners' part, to Latina/o adults in Holyoke.

As you may also be aware, over the past few years and months Holyoke has had some horrible tragedies that have affected many of our community members, including learners here at CEP. As a long-time resident of Holyoke, these events have further confirmed for me the need to address violence as a community issue at every possible opportunity. For these and several other reasons, we at CEP have been increasingly aware of the reality of violence as an issue impacting the lives of those who study with us as well as our families, friends, and neighbors.

This is why we jumped at the opportunity to apply to participate in World Education's Women, Violence, and Adult Education project. This project focuses on promoting the ability of adult education programs across New England to recognize and address violence as an issue affecting the lives of all learners, particularly women learners. After I attended an initial Institute in April — which was an amazing learning and growing experience — we applied to become a funded partner in this project, and recently received word that our application was accepted.

As one of our initial steps, I am sending out the enclosed survey to you and other adult educators in Holyoke. We will use the survey responses, together with a series of interviews with community members and an ongoing student focus group, to generate a local action plan for October 2000 through September 2001. While our efforts will be strongly focused on work with students, we also plan to facilitate discussions about issues related to women and violence among local adult educators.

I am hoping that you can fill out and return the survey to me as soon as possible, ideally by August 21. We will send out draft copies of our action plan in September to every educator from whom we receive a response. And please know that I would be delighted to discuss this project with you at any time.

Thank you very much in advance.
Sincerely,
Maria Salgado

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Adult Basic Education
Women, Violence, and Adult Education Questionnaire

Please take time to fill out and return to: Maria Salgado, Community Education Project, 300 High Street Holyoke, MA 01040

1. Is violence in women's (students') lives an issue in your classroom/program?

   ☐ Yes

   ☐ No

2. If it is, how did you become aware of violence in women's lives as an important issue in your classroom and program?

3. What evidence do you have — what have you seen, heard, or sensed — that tells you that violence affects students and their learning?

4. What, if any, actions have you taken in your classroom, program, or community to address the issue of violence in women's lives and to create a learning environment that takes issues of violence into account?

5. What supports you in addressing the issue? What hinders you from addressing the issue?

At the same time, Maria Salgado was recruiting learners from ESOL and Native Language Literacy classrooms, as well as Latina women from other adult basic education programs in the city, to form a women's group.

As the group came together she reached out to the community again and worked with the learners to hire a counselor. The following is the letter she wrote to recruit the counselor:

September 13, 2000

Dear Colleague,

It is with great excitement that I mail you the enclosed job description for a counselor/ therapist position we have available. The Community Education Project is a small community-based adult basic education project in Holyoke. We work primarily with low-income Latinos from Holyoke. We provide two levels of ESOL instruction and two levels of Native Language Literacy in Spanish. All four classes are held during the day in different areas of the city. If you want further information regarding the classes please feel free to call us.

Our new and exciting project complements the work that we already do with literacy, but with a focus on violence in the lives of Latina women. We will be reading and writing stories about violence and discussing the impact of trauma and violence in our own lives and those of women in our community in general. The project is designed to observe how women's experiences of trauma affect their educational outcomes, help us understand the kinds of support needed to better ensure educational success among our women students, and help the students involved in the group strengthen their literacy skills as well as their ability to reach their personal educational goals.

We are looking for a fully bilingual counselor with clinical skills and experience working with Latina survivors of violence, ideally in both group and individual settings. This person will provide clinical support to members of our group as well as our staff. S/he will be hired on a contract basis for a few hours per week, according to the attached description; students already participating in the group will be heavily involved in the selection process.

We hope you will consider applying! Please feel free to contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,
Maria Salgado
CEP Counselor/Special Projects Coordinator

Transformation of Physical Working Environment

Project Hope

Anna and Char transformed their physical working environment. They began by getting the support of students by asking them to imagine a place where they would be able to learn. It took a summer working on the classroom to make some of what the students imagined a reality.

Char and I had to wait until summer school was over before we could begin with the transformation process. However, at the end of the school year, we had a "visioning day." On this day, the women of the Adult Learning Program envisioned what their new classroom would look and feel like.

Despite having done this type of remodeling before, I had forgotten that trying to make changes on an old building would require a little more time and patience than usual. We were very pleased to have other staff members, volunteers, and students help out with painting and cleaning. The walls of the classroom changed from mustard yellow to a bright peach, while the kitchen was made light green. The beautiful woodwork of the room was cleaned and polished. All of the clutter — tangled computer cords, overloaded bookshelves, and dusty metal file cabinets — were cleared and organized. We purchased twelve beautiful padded chairs and replaced a couple of the broken halogen lamps.

Not only did students and teachers dedicate their time and energy to improving our classroom, many also donated artwork that has really brightened up the room. The large window that was once blocked by dark, faded curtains, is now adorned by a stain-glass picture of a mother and child. The literature teacher gave us a fountain with rocks and shells. Char received donations of pastel green and purple plates and mugs for our kitchen.

We have received positive feedback from both staff and learners. Members of the Project Hope staff have described the newly remodeled classroom as "spiritual," "stupendous," "peaceful," and "relaxing." A prospective intern from Boston College remarked that "sitting/being here has made a difference in my day."

In addition to transforming the space, we have also established community liaisons with the Dorchester Adult Literacy Coalition and Monsignor Ryan High School; Char attended a staff development session at the Omega Institute in New York entitled "Finding Your Soul's Purpose"; and Char and I took a women's studies class called "Women and Addictions" at the University of Massachusetts in Boston.

Chapter Two

Build a Web of Support

Introduction
    Build Program Support
    Build Community Support
    Take Care of Your Self
    References

Tools for Programs: Reflect and Take Action
    Building Supports

Examples from Programs
    Study Circle
    Support Group

Introduction

Building a web of support is the most essential action to address the impact of violence on learning. You can strengthen your support system by

> building supports within your program;
> reaching out into your community; and
> taking better care of your own self.

Imagine how you would feel about this work if you knew that there were many people who supported your efforts. Knowing that you are not alone, that there are resources in your program and your community to assist you, and that each step of the way you are also taking care of yourself may transform fears into feelings of excitement and hope.

Building supports not only helps you to take on the work of addressing the impacts of violence on learning. Building supports does address the impact of violence on learning. There are a number of ways in which it actually is the work, not just something you do to get on with the work.

Building supports can look very different in different settings. In some programs there may already be a range of supports in place — a culture of self-care, program support mechanisms, and strong community connections to build on. In others, each aspect of developing supports may be a task in itself. Once we have supports in place for ourselves, the program and the larger community, we may then be able to imagine introducing varied new programming — such as new courses, new student support groups, new staff roles, or new policies.

In this chapter, we introduce the ways in which the teachers that participated in the Women, Violence, and Adult Education (WVAE) project built their webs of support and the hopes and struggles they faced along the way.

Sally Gabb
imagining support

Build Program Support

Why build program support? Talking with your colleagues about issues of violence alters the weight given to the issue, and moves it from private "hallway" conversation to public discussion. Rather than individualizing and privatizing the problem, it addresses violence as the social problem that it is, one which can be addressed through social change. Once out in the open, we can examine our understanding of violence and our concerns about how it affects learning. Building supports can change the ways in which we understand and respond to violence in our society. Rather than seeing violence as a fact of life, building support is an active step from which we get renewed energy and renewed meaning. It is not a passive, paralyzed stance. Connecting with others interested in these issues reminds us that we are not alone in our belief that violence is not to be tolerated.

Building program support can take many forms. The process may need to begin with making the case with your colleagues for addressing impacts of violence on learning. Professional development can be an effective way to engage staff in talking about issues of violence. Hiring or engaging a therapist for staff to talk to about the issues that arise for both staff and students when violence is explicitly named in the program can be another invaluable way to strengthen a program's capacity and resolve to do this work.

When building program supports, think about ways that your work will continue beyond the efforts of a few committed individuals. For example, by involving all levels of program staff in activities around women and violence one program enabled administrators to experience the benefits themselves. This has led to a long-term commitment to addressing the impacts of violence on learning being written into their annual budget.

Claim Legitimacy

Just as we struggled at times with our own doubts about taking on this work, the teachers that participated in the Women, Violence, and Adult Education project also found that among their colleagues, both teachers and administrators, there were varying degrees of willingness to talk about issues of violence and the effects of violence on learning. Janice, the coordinator of the Even Start LINKS program, pointed out that fear was often at the root of the resistance she encountered:

> *First, I started talking about it with other teachers. I found that, like me, they were also reacting to violence, but they weren't talking about it, as if they shouldn't be intervening at all. I started talking to them about addressing the issue with the women in the group [the students]. The two Even Start LINKS teachers were very supportive. In Even Start, you look at barriers to learning, and they saw this as a big barrier. But the Adult Basic Education (ABE) staff didn't want to look at it. They didn't want to deal with anything to do with violence. I think it was fear — fear that what they might hear would be too painful, fear that some student might freak out and they wouldn't know what to do, fear of the things they might learn. If you don't know what's going on, then you don't have to do anything.* **(Janice)**

The teachers found that they often had to build the case for how this work is essential to quality programming and better service for students as a first step for encouraging staff to listen.

The two primary ways they claimed legitimacy were by

1. sharing research that documents the prevalence of violence and its impact on learning and
2. pointing to the existence of government-funded projects that involve researchers and professional development "experts."

Teachers often "made their case" by referring to the existence of Jenny Horsman's research, *Too Scared to Learn: Women, Violence and Education*, which documents the impacts of violence on women's learning and the prevalence of violence in our society. Participants, such as Anna at Project Hope, even referred to the academic credentials of "Dr. Horsman" to convince staff that they could not ignore the issue:

> *[One colleague] who has been a teacher for years used to say things like, "So-and-so is too lazy to come to class." I didn't think her attitude would ever change. But a turning point for the whole staff was when Jenny gave a workshop.... When our staff heard, "Doctor Jenny Horsman is speaking at Harvard," it sounded very impressive. The whole staff attended and one...had a complete turnaround. Her attitude is totally different now. She wants me to come and give lectures to her fellow...teachers.... In general, I've seen the sensitivity and patience levels go up.* **(Anna)**

Teachers also made the case by reading Jenny's book with staff to draw in their colleagues and fuel discussion.

The existence of women and violence projects and funds for unconventional expenses enabled some project participants, including Tammy and Katy at Getting Ready to Work in Vermont, to justify activities they might not otherwise have been able to try:

> *The project has definitely influenced what we think about when we do our planning. It's enabled us to do more with spirituality and the arts in our programming. Without the project, we would have had less permission to do these things.... For example, our fiscal agent was not used to seeing fresh flowers as a classroom expense and questioned the validity.... The authority is wherever the money is coming from.... Even if we know that violence is a serious issue, that isn't a priority for any of the organizations that fund us. This project allowed us to research this with some authority.* **(Tammy and Katy)**

Finding sources to support claims to legitimacy may be an important step in your process of addressing the impact of violence on learning.

Participate in Professional Development with Colleagues

Professional development is a way to help both you and your colleagues become more comfortable with the complex issue of violence and plan for changes. Yet depending on the nature of your program, raising these issues with your colleagues may be difficult or something you fear. Janice described her reluctance to talk with fellow staff in this way:

> *Looking at the other staff, there are a lot of people who don't like change and feel threatened by staff development. I see this as part of staff development. Some resistance might just be to newness, and some staff people may have personal issues that haven't been resolved.* **(Janice)**

It may be helpful for you to reassure colleagues that learning more about issues of violence and implications for teaching and learning does not necessarily require that you share or listen to the "horror stories" of violence. Teachers in this project found that during the training sponsored by the WVAE project, they were able to speak about the prevalence of violence in society without actually telling stories of violence. Let your colleagues know that taking on this work does not necessitate self-disclosure.

> *The other thing I really liked about the training sessions was that we all came with our own stuff and some of us with really heavy stuff, but we didn't go there, and I'm assuming that was deliberate. I think it was a very effective way of approaching it, because we all acknowledged that everyone has that stuff but because we didn't go there, we could do the work with a certain objectivity and stand outside it, which I thought was uplifting and powerful.* **(Janice)**
>
> *I believe that is how teachers can do the work, too. You don't have to hear the stories, just acknowledge the violence in all of our lives, live beside it, talk about it in relationship to our learning, our presence, our work.* **(Elizabeth)**
>
> *How do we convey that to teachers? That they don't have to go to the place they are so fearful of?* **(Janice)**

The extent to which other staff members were brought into the women and violence work varied from program to program. The participating teachers tried a number of professional development activities to provide themselves and their colleagues with a way to learn more about the issues: full-day retreats and training workshops, discussions on the topic at regular staff meetings, special staff meetings sometimes with guests from the community to facilitate meetings.

Tammy and Katy began by organizing a staff retreat and hired a social worker to serve as a "mentor advisor" for the day. They arranged to meet in a beautiful location to support their own well-being during their planning process:

> *It was great to plan in a quiet and lovely spot that provided nurture and a connection to nature, where we could concentrate removed from other demands.* **(Tammy and Katy)**

Vermont Adult Learning staff continued to meet periodically as a group to evaluate their work. They took the time to engage in serious self-reflection, and they challenged themselves to consider the ways in which they, as staff, participated in perpetuating violence. Another way both Tammy and Katy continued to educate themselves about this topic was by participating with students in courses taught by outside "experts":

> *The Well-Being Support Group was a staff development experience for us.... We learned about learning.* **(Tammy and Katy)**

Similar to the staff at Vermont Adult Learning, Anna and Char of Project Hope found that their in-house professional development led staff to reflect not only on students, but also on themselves and the climate of their workplace:

> *In some of our interactions in our everyday life here, we don't respect people.... There are staff agreements about how we treat each other, and after our talk about violence, we reaffirmed our staff agreements. We decided that at the next staff retreat we need to address what these agreements mean.* **(Anna and Char)**

Leslie and Kim at York Corrections found that the added legitimacy they gained by inviting the WVAE program director to one of their staff retreats was an effective way to generate enthusiasm among staff to participate:

> *That was an all-day session. It focused on healing ourselves. As people who are involved in the healing of others, we need to pay particular attention to our own emotional health.... The teachers who attended were really positive about it.* **(Kim)**

Realizing that change is often slow and requires patience and persistence can help you to not get discouraged. Maria at the Community Education Project (CEP) talked about how, in hindsight, she was glad that she persisted in raising the issue of violence at staff meetings, even when Yolanda Robles, a Native Language Literacy teacher at CEP who is one of her peers, was opposed to talking about it. Resistance can be an indicator that people are not yet ready to take something on and can help key you into thinking about what new conditions you need to create to support people in their readiness. In this instance, Yolanda did not wish to revisit her own experiences with violence. Yet over time and when she was ready, she became one of the leaders in this program around women and violence work, and created a community theater performance with students about domestic violence that was attended by over a hundred people in the community. (See Chapter 3 for more information on the content and process of the performance.)

In a conversation with Elizabeth, Yolanda explained that when she first addressed issues of violence with students, she was still very apprehensive. Her own fear had not dissipated prior to her taking action; rather, she was so moved by the situation of one of her students who needed support that she began to actively work on these issues despite, or alongside, her fear:

> *The words "women" and "violence" frightened me to the limit. I tried to address issues of violence but I just couldn't. Then one of my students came to the classroom all hurt by her husband. When I saw my student so hurt, I started thinking....*
>
> *I had a wonderful group of students at that time. I had lived the same violence. I was in a position of power with that group and I felt I had to do something. We talked. I brought in the poem "Tengo flores hoy." (See Resources page 156.) And they wanted to do a play. Since then I have been able to talk....* **(Yolanda)**

Similarly, Tammy and Katy found one of their colleagues to be outspoken in not wanting to take on this project, but for different reasons:

> *[One colleague] was angry with us last spring for taking the World Education project on because she saw us divide ourselves up too much! She was also concerned that addressing violence explicitly would intensify our agenda and invite more stories and more work and we're already run too thin. She felt that we could potentially be endangered by explicitly addressing violence.* **(Tammy and Katy)**

Her fears were allayed and she became enthusiastic about the project when she saw that staff were able to (1) integrate this work into their existing programming rather than adding it on to their already overflowing plates; (2) nurture a culture of self-care to prevent their own burnout; and (3) better support students in their own learning and development.

> *Now she glows when she talks about the Wednesday [Well-Being support] groups.* **(Tammy and Katy)**

Finding the balance between being sympathetic to staff's concerns and moving the work forward may be one of the greatest challenges in winning staff support. Janice described how she was learning to navigate this tension:

> *You see the need and it's hard to pull back and say we can't do anything about this.... [I'm] learning to be less confrontational when I'm telling [staff] what they may not want to hear.* **(Janice)**

Gain the Support of Administrators

Depending on organizational structures and practices, it can be a challenge to change programs especially if you are a teacher with little to no decision-making power. Clearly, the more that program leadership is actively behind violence and education work, the better. And yet even when the administrators may personally support the work, program structures and the systems in which they operate may make it very difficult to institute change.

Director support for the WVAE project varied from program to program, from those who were actively supportive and involved to those who approved of the project but were hands-off. Janice at the Even Start Program in Maine and Maria at the Community Education Program in Massachusetts both experienced first-hand the difference it made to the work when the administration is actively behind the project:

> *[A former administrator] was ambivalent about our participation in this project. She said she was supportive, but really she hedged. The new director, however, supported the project in action as well as in words. He encouraged the staff to attend trainings, and he attended himself. I really saw a difference. The staff started opening up, started talking about their fears. And we started looking at how to create a place of safety for everyone. For the first time, what had been isolated incidents seemed connected and integrated.* **(Janice)**
>
> *I didn't have the problems with him [Paul Hyry, CEP director] that a lot of other people seem to have had with their administration. Sometimes he came to our study circles. But, being a white male, he wasn't as active as he wanted to be. He read Jenny's book. He really liked the idea of the medicine wheel*[1]*— teaching to the mind, body, spirit, and emotions. He encouraged me to work all four aspects into my teaching. He understood all about white male privilege. He tries to be an ally to people of color.* **(Maria)**

A few of the teachers mentioned having difficulties with program systems and bureaucracies, where, for example, cumbersome budgeting requirements held up the release of funds, making it difficult for the teachers to hire resource people. Working in the prison system where administrators need to follow strict state guidelines may be one of the most difficult settings for instituting change and creating program-wide support for women and violence work. Kim and Leslie tried to institutionalize changes through curriculum development. They hoped that the administrators would adopt the women and violence work as part of the existing curriculum:

> *[The administrators] might allow us to incorporate what we are doing this year into the regular curriculum instead of treating it as an extra thing. We have an Extension Curriculum that we are required by the state to teach.... It involves lessons on parenting, family issues, HIV, sexual harassment, and transitioning back into the community. We would like to get the violence project included so it becomes part of the mainstream classroom culture in the prisons. This is challenging because the Extension Curriculum is used in all prisons statewide, including the men's prisons.* **(Kim)**

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[1] Our knowledge of the medicine wheel comes from First Nation educators. See Jenny Horsman, *Too Scared to Learn: Women, Violence, and Education*, p. 77.

Not just in large bureaucracies, but also in small community-based programs such as Project Hope, teachers found great value in trying to integrate the women and violence work into existing programming, rather than adding on special projects or classes.

One way for administrators to support women and violence work, and validate this type of programming, is to secure additional funding. As Maria points out, there is only so much that teachers can be expected to do in part-time jobs with no benefits and little pay:

> *Part of the challenge is getting funding to do this kind of work, because if I was there full-time, I know I would be able to do a lot more.* **(Maria)**

Recruit a Therapist to Support Staff

While providing teachers with professional development is recognized as a perfectly legitimate way to support staff, hiring a therapist for staff can be a radical idea for many programs. Yet, working with a therapist can be the richest form of professional development for teachers engaged in women and violence work.

Literacy work can be exhausting and overwhelming, yet rarely do teachers have opportunities to get extra help to support their efforts. The programs that did hire a therapist found that support to be invaluable. There are many ways to work with a therapist: the therapist can meet individually with staff, participate in staff meetings, and/or help facilitate classes with students. Meeting with a therapist after class allows for the instructor to process what occurred in class, what she might do next time, and what personal issues were touched for her.

Consider involving students in the process of hiring a therapist. In Maria's group the women worked together to post an ad for the therapist, interview the candidates, and collectively decide which person would serve them best. Students also made decisions about how often the therapist would come to the group, modifying the extent of her involvement as they went along, until they found what worked best for everyone:

> *[The therapist] was part of their world and understood their culture, but was also a professional. At first, she came every other week [the group met five days a week]. But the women wanted her to come more often, so she changed to once a week. She gave me a good deal of support. She would help me evaluate what had happened that day in the class and help me decide about next steps to take. She was very honest and direct. Also, she played the guitar and was interested in arts and crafts and wrote poetry. So she could do a lot of things with the women. They loved her.*
>
> *Thank God I have Cassie [the therapist] to help. I do not think I would have been able to continue doing the work if I did not have her to support me.... There was a lot of discussion about violence and that was really hard for me as a facilitator and as a member of this community.* **(Maria)**

Staff at the Even Start LINKS program found that a therapist helped them learn ways to support women in crisis effectively and so avoid becoming overwhelmed themselves:

> *[The therapist brought] a certain objectivity. She gave the teachers and myself an opportunity to examine and clarify our roles with the families. She helped me process my role as supervisor of the teachers and what I could provide them with that would be useful. [It was an] opportunity for teachers to save up problems and situations that they were uncomfortable with and needed feedback with. They knew once a month she was coming…[and] they were ready for her. They prioritized the problems and we processed them one by one. She gave very objective feedback. Sometimes she would ask questions so they could clarify things for themselves. Sometimes it was suggesting alternatives.*
>
> *For one family that had had a death in the family, she had very specific suggestions like contacting Project HOPE for support and counseling, the death and dying support group at the hospital…. Not only that, she was willing to go on home visits…. She helped not only us as a staff, but the families, also. Because she was in a family program she had that focus. We were able to get all the children into counseling and arrange for counseling at school. She helped create that structure to help them.*
>
> *There are so many ways she helped the program. She had such a calming way. The teachers were sometimes very stressed. After 15 to 20 minutes, I noticed there seemed to be a peaceful calm in talking. It seemed suddenly like everything was manageable. That is very, very necessary for staff in the type of program we work in…to be able to feel that calm, know that there is hope, that everyone will be able to carry on in some way. She was very open to questions…. All questions were treated with the utmost respect. She had a genuine way of listening that made people feel they were being heard. She was very good at handing it back to someone, so they could come up with their own solutions…. I think there was real value in bringing someone in from the outside.* **(Janice)**

While teachers in the WVAE project found that working with a therapist was an essential component of their web of support, some found it also posed challenges. Because educators and therapists often have different backgrounds, training, and perspectives, it may be a good idea to discuss your assumptions about teaching, learning, and students, both before and while engaging the therapist. Maria stressed how important it was to the students that the therapist was part of their world and understood their culture. Leslie talked about the difficulties they had bringing in a clinical consultant from outside the prison community. She said it took huge amounts of time and energy on her part to help the therapist feel comfortable in the prison setting, and for that reason the relationship did not work out to be a supportive one for the teachers. In contrast, Kim added, it was much easier to work with the World Education project director, for example, as she was "familiar with the context." Each educational context will need different supports, but in all situations it is important to establish a way of learning from one another's culture in order for the relationship to be mutually beneficial.

Working with the poor in organizations that have few resources can create a mindset of needing to "get by" on very little. Scarce resources can make it difficult to free up funding for therapy support. It can also contribute to a belief that it is simply a luxury outside the realm of possibility. Whenever it is feasible the rewards of working with a therapist will make the effort worthwhile to consider it a funding need. Some programs shifted money in existing budgets to work with a therapist. At the Genesis Center they made it a priority to hire a counselor for their ESOL program. However, if no such funding is found there are ways to get around not having the resources to pay for a therapist. For example, you can call a women's hotline service that typically operate 24 hours a day and talk with one of the volunteers about your class or issues that were raised for you. You may find a volunteer therapist in your local community. Or you may be able to work out a collaborative arrangement with a local women's shelter or other anti-violence or health agencies. Getting staff to support the idea may require ongoing discussions. In the meantime, you may find that the place to begin is with engaging this type of support person for yourself and sharing your experience with the others.

Build Community Support

Why build community support? In adult education, there is often the mindset of "having to do it alone," even when there may be a wealth of resources in the community that you can draw upon. By reaching into your communities and connecting with others who are committed to this work, you overcome the isolation that violence causes, and create more supports and possibilities for yourself and your students.

Considering both what you need and have to offer may help you reach out into your community. For example, an exchange between adult education providers and health providers may be exceptionally beneficial. Another possibility is to connect to communities outside your immediate geographic area to hook up with like-minded people also interested in women, violence, and education efforts. Especially since literacy and anti-violence work can be so isolating, the more you are able to feel connected to others and efforts larger than yourself, the more you may find that you have the energy and inspiration to keep taking on this challenging work. Katy, one of the project participants who had the chance to have an in-depth conversation with Susan Heald,[2] learned more about the many individuals committed to addressing the impact of violence on learning, and was moved by the power of not feeling so alone:

> *We benefited from the struggle to articulate new ideas and the larger sense of connection to unknown others in an invisible but strong web of caring.*
> **(Katy)**

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[2] Susan Heald (of the University of Manitoba) and Jenny Horsman did research on what happens when literacy practitioners try to make violence more visible in their programs and make changes to their practice. Go to www.jennyhorsman.com and click on "Articles" for papers from that research.

Workshop participant's collage on finding community support

Draw in Resources

Invite resource people from your community into your classroom. Program participants chose people that fell into two broad categories: one related to health and well-being and the other focussing explicitly on issues of violence. A wide range of people provided different experiences where students could explore ways to promote their own sense of well-being, understand issues of violence as well as identify essential resources. The first group included artists; people who could lead meditation, stress reduction, self-esteem and self-defense classes, and mindfulness/awareness exercises with students; career counselors; and women in the community who had "made it" and wanted to share their experiences. The second group included educators from women's shelters, or people with very specific skills who could help one group, for example, create a bilingual play on domestic violence.

Some of the teachers did not limit themselves to experts in their immediate geographical area, but also invited speakers from throughout their states. Some speakers were paid by programs; others were paid by their own agencies as part of their regular jobs which included outreach; and yet others volunteered their services. Mostly the teachers chose whom to invite, except in Maria's group at the Community Education Project, where students decided what kinds of presenters they wanted. They began by inviting a local educator to talk about domestic violence. Students in Maria's class also located other resources in the community by collectively doing a community mapping activity that identified their community allies. (See page 64 for details about community mapping.)

Consider tapping into resources that you may not have previously considered. For example, staff at Vermont Adult Learning agreed, after some initial hesitation, to have a high school student teach a writing workshop. Although the staff first had concerns about the differences in age, class, and life experiences between the young teacher and students, they decided to give it a try with the provision that one of them be present in class and work with the high school student/facilitator as needed. With this support, the class turned out to be a very positive and rich experience for all concerned.

Although bringing in resource people can be beneficial, it can also be difficult. Teachers realized that they needed to be careful when choosing speakers for a culturally diverse audience. At Genesis, the teachers found that when they sought the help of one local ethno-cultural agency to meet with all the students, it did not work well. But when they set a time for agency staff to meet specifically with the women of that particular cultural group alone to talk about violence and resources in the community, it led some women to follow up on resources available. When they invited a white male unfamiliar with the community to talk about self-defense, his style and assumptions clashed with those of students. When the staff talked about it, they discovered they had a resource in one of their own women teachers who was trained in self-defense.

Programs found it was important to tell guests about the ways in which students were used to working. Sometimes the difference in expectation led to valuable negotiations between students and teachers. For example, Joan, the collage artist who facilitated workshops in the Vermont program, believed that students needed to be quiet while creating their artwork, so they tried silence, even though some of the students felt uncomfortable:

> *The way the activity was structured helped women learn about themselves. For instance, we experimented with doing the collages in complete silence, having conversations while doing them, or playing different kinds of music. The discussions led us all to realize that people have different learning styles and preferences. Some women would put together a collage in one session. Others took three sessions to do just one. We talked about the differences in the ways we worked and validated everyone's unique style.*
> **(Tammy)**

(See Chapter 3 page 87 for more discussion on silence, talk, and music.)

Be a Resource

Consider how you and your program can benefit other agencies and organizations in your community. For example, your knowledge about the needs and lives of the learners with whom you work could potentially benefit others to better serve this same population. The strongest webs of support are created through a mutual process of giving and receiving.

Maria, for example, spoke of the give-and-take relationship that she developed with the local women's shelter:

> *Our relationship with the women's shelter has evolved to the point where I think they really see the project as a resource for the women and their shelter as well, as they are more than willing to assist when we need a shelter for a particular student. They asked me to come and do a presentation during their volunteer training. There has been a mutual exchange of services and professional development training.... Whereas before there were resistances, they doubted my/our abilities to do this work, now there is a working relationship.* **(Maria)**

Maria and her students participated in the march against domestic violence organized by the women's shelter, and Maria was asked to serve on the statewide taskforce on poverty and domestic violence.

Form a Study Group

Forming a study group, or circle, with others who are interested in reading about and discussing issues of oppression and violence is another way of expanding your network of support.

Some teachers were able to find a variety of community members eager to work together to develop a deeper understanding of issues they all struggled with:

> *There was the community liaison for the Domestic Violence Task Force of the local district attorney's office. She worked mostly with K-12 and was excited about the support group. Then there was the director of the local Women's Information Services, which provides court assistance for victims of violence and runs a hotline. Then we had Winona Ward, who is an attorney and an amazing woman. She has a mobile office with a 4-wheel drive. She goes out to victims' homes and takes them through the whole legal process free of charge. She herself grew up in an abusive situation.... She knows how abusive the court system can be and is determined to help victims through it as best she can. Another member of the study circle was Ann Bridges. She was my job coach before I started working.*
>
> *We got together every six weeks and had lunch. One time we discussed an article, another time a chapter from* Too Scared to Learn. *We talked about existing resources and what we would like to see developed. One time we watched* Together We Bloom. *Everyone was open to the idea that violence is systemic and part of the whole fabric of our society. We had some good discussions on how this is all interconnected.* **(Tammy)**

(See page 70 for a detailed description of this study circle.)

Recruiting for study circles may be challenging. Maria found that sending out a survey to other adult basic education teachers in the community, which asked if they wanted to meet, was not particularly effective as only three of the 25 surveys were returned.

> *I think it just points out how devalued Adult Basic Education is.... There are such constraints on all of us that very few teachers have the time to do what they see as something extra.* **(Maria)**

Like Maria, Janice found that her group also got off to a slow start, but was surprised that the participants found it valuable enough to want to continue once the group got underway:

> *The study circle was not as successful as I would have liked. It was difficult squeezing it into an already busy schedule.... But the interesting thing was when we had finished all the study circles we said we would do, people wanted to continue.* **(Janice)**

In very large programs where there is usually little communication between departments, study groups can create community within the organization:

> *Our study circles turned into study/planning groups. We read parts of* Too Scared to Learn *and discussed them. And we worked together to create special classes and groups that would conform to prison rules. It was the first time that representatives from different sections of the prison got together and sat in the same room creating something. It was a collective effort. For example, the correctional officer helped us figure out the logistics and legalities of having big groups together in one room. She told us we had to keep the young people separate. We learned from her the regulations and procedures we had to follow.* **(Kim)**

Extend the Web

Study groups require that participants all be in close proximity to one another, but you may also try to build your network of support by using written materials and by communicating over the Internet to learn about other ideas, resources, individuals, and organizations already involved in this work. Sometimes all you need is to know that other people are out there, doing the same work, whom you could possibly contact if needed.

Whether inside the program, in the immediate community, or much further away, making connections, as Janice describes when reflecting on the project-sponsored trainings, can make all the difference in helping you see the meaning and possibility in your work and struggles:

> *The support of everyone at the training was very helpful. I would think about them from time to time, especially when I was having a difficult time, and I would think, "I am going to have to tell everyone about this." I knew that was a place I could talk and be understood. Just knowing that gave me an impetus to move on, to push a little harder, to not give up or say "I cannot do this."*
>
> *Knowing that other people were having a hard time — in some cases, having a harder time — and that it wasn't just me.... Knowing there is a bunch of women who are like-minded is a wonderful support. Sometimes in our personal and professional lives, because we are so busy, it becomes a little bit like a desert — there just isn't that comforting presence of people who think in similar ways. That support is so valuable.* **(Janice)**

Take Care of Your Self

Creating a supportive environment to take on the work of addressing the impact of violence must include supporting your own well-being. In addition to these external connections and supports, we also need to develop connections with ourselves and our inner wisdom to learn about our own limits and needs.

We found a lot of helpful information about how to think about this challenging task in Karen Saakvitne and Laurie Ann Pearlman's workbook on vicarious trauma (1996). Vicarious trauma is the term used in the therapeutic field to refer to the impact of repeatedly hearing the stories of trauma experienced by others. Although literacy workers may not hear detailed stories of horrific experiences, repeated references to the dreadful occurrences in many students' lives, along with those the worker may have experienced herself, or know of in the lives of her colleagues and friends, can take a heavy toll.

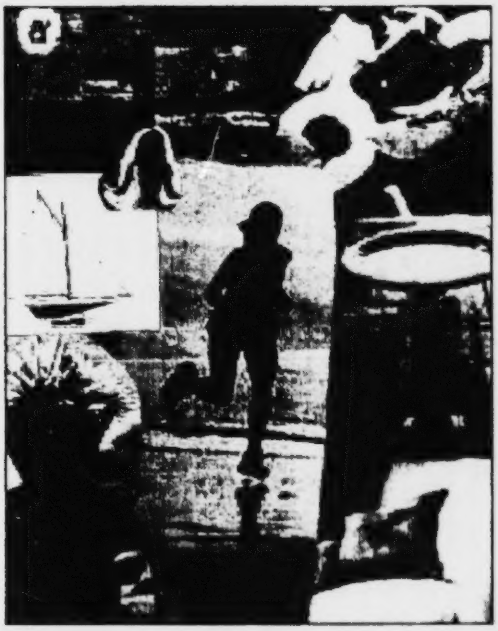
The book explains that awareness, balance, and connection are the essential ABCs of self-care in the face of trauma. Awareness is being attuned to "our own needs, limits, emotions, and resources." It is this awareness that will help us set our own boundaries and offer clear messages to others about what we can hear, when. An excellent example of a teacher's awareness of her own needs was included in *Too Scared to Learn.* Evelyn Battell said,

> I don't want to be a counsellor; I'm no good at it. I can't stand to hear that much of it. I said to a student the other week, you know I can see this is horrific, and I'm gonna just cry as hard as you. Let's go find a counselor. I'm not gonna be any use to you here. I'm so upset already, if you tell me any more, you'll have to take care of me. That cracked her up, you know. So she agreed to go find a counsellor. (2000:246)

A first step in self-care is learning to know our own limits and to recognize when we have overstepped them and need to redraw them carefully, always recognizing our own responsibility for preserving them. Awareness requires that we allow for quiet and time for reflection so that we can identify our needs.

A balance between work, play, and rest is another important aspect of self-care. Inner balance, finding the strong center from within yourself, "requires mindfulness and awareness." When the Vermont staff participated in mindfulness, writing, and collage groups in their program, as part of the WVAE project, this not only served as professional development that allowed them to learn new teaching approaches, but also gave them time to look at trying to consider their own needs. Dede Mackie, one of the Getting Ready to Work teachers, wrote:

> *I have many friends that write in their journals daily and feel their inner selves are listened to through their writing. I spent years running fast and hard from myself. A genuine fear that if I slowed down my painful past would swallow me. To actually sit down and write about these fears — NO WAY. In class I tapped into the more fun times in my life and felt at ease writing about them.* **(Dede)**



Workshop participant's collage on self-care

Pearlman and Saakvitne see connection as the third aspect of the ABCs of self-care. They remind us that connection includes "connection to others, to ourselves and to something larger than ourselves." They also encourage us to recognize many aspects of care, describing three key elements: self-care, nurturing yourself, and escaping:

> Self-care includes balance, limits, healthy habits, and connection with others. Nurturing yourself includes gentleness, a focus on pleasure and comfort, relaxation, and play. Escape includes activities that allow you to forget about work, to engage in fantasy, and to get away from painful feelings. (1996:72)

This concept of three different aspects of care may help us to see ways we are already taking care of ourselves and find ways to enhance our strategies. When reflecting on her experience with writing and reading, Dede noticed her own patterns and from this awareness, was able to recognize the balance she needs between different aspects of care.

> *One way I shut out the real world is to read. My therapist used to greet me and then ask how many books I had read that week. Some weeks it would be ten. I was the mother of young children, very active, and the only quiet times in my hectic schedule were spent reading. I didn't have to sit and be with myself. In fact, I couldn't stand quiet time. I was too afraid....*
>
> *Now one of my greatest pleasures is to be by myself, to think things through and to feel safe and comfortable. I've just finished vacation and I still have a stack of unread books next to my bed. I realized that when I work, I need the down time from reading to relax. It feels good that I'm relaxing, not escaping.* **(Dede)**

The WVAE trainings included a range of self-care activities. Sites for our training sessions were carefully selected to offer beauty, comfort, and nourishing foods in settings committed to social justice work. Each evening we carried out creative, reflective tasks such as creating prayer flags, beautifying our journals, or making collages. On one occasion a massage therapist came to give neck and back massages. An attempt to find balance between challenge and nurturance, learning new information and reflecting, may enhance professional development activities to support understanding the impact of violence on learning.

Project participants found that by and large, although they recognized the importance of taking care of themselves and modeling self-care with students, they did not do it as much as they would have liked. Teachers struggled to break from the culture of their organizations and their personal habits to introduce better self-care into the program and into their lives. Tammy insisted that she take a lunch break rather than work through her lunch hour. She helped her colleagues see that they were all assuming that this was self-indulgent and not something that committed workers have the time to do. Instead of buying into the mindset of "too much to do with too little time," she encouraged her colleagues to pay better attention to the ways they could engender a culture of self-care in the program and in their lives.

Char collapsed when she pushed herself to her limit as she tried to fill the role of director, teacher, and counselor with all her love and energy at a time when the learning center was short-staffed. She has now put up a quote circulated by email and widely attributed to Thomas Merton in her office to remind herself of her important lesson:

> There is a contemporary form of violence to which the idealist fighting for peace by nonviolent methods most easily succumbs: activism and overwork. The rush and pressure of modern life are a form, perhaps the most common form, of its innate violence. To allow oneself to be carried away by a multitude of conflicting concerns, to surrender to too many demands, to commit oneself to too many projects, to want to help everyone in everything is to succumb to violence, more than that, it is cooperation in violence. It destroys the fruitfulness of one's work because it kills the root of inner wisdom which makes work fruitful.

These words remind us all to make self-care an integral part of our work. In this way, we will challenge the violence in society through not only what we do, but also through how we carry out the work. As we pay attention to our own selves and seek wholeness and balance, we are more likely to see the students we work with as fellow travelers on the road to healing and wellness. When we have experienced the challenge of creating wholeness in our own lives, we know that we don't have all the answers for ourselves, so we certainly cannot tell anyone else what they ought to do. When we have tried to write in our own journal regularly and found how hard it is, for example, we are less likely to be critical of students when they explore their own limits in the literacy program. Taking care of ourselves, balancing our needs, and making radical change in our lives are not simple tasks. But as we take on the challenges ourselves, we can share the experience of the struggles as well as the joys, we can share the value of integrating self-care and wholeness, and we can perhaps exchange insights gleaned from our own experiences.

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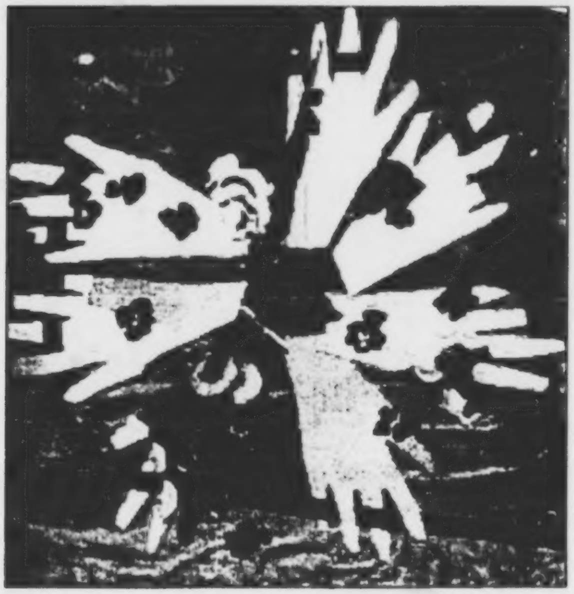
Tools for Programs: Reflect and Take Action

Building Supports

1. How would you identify colleagues in your program who would be interested in addressing the impacts of violence on learning?
2. In what ways could you help support staff — both those who may be open to this work and those who may be more reluctant — to explore their understanding of these issues and the implications for programming?
3. How would you build your network of community supports? What would be a good place to start? You may wish to do the Community Mapping activity on the following page with staff and students.
4. Make a list of the ways you enjoy nurturing yourself — both in your workplace and in your personal life. Consider which ones you could provide for yourself, without feeling like you have yet another thing to do.
5. What would help you to take care of yourself? For example, you may have someone who could check in with you periodically to ask you about how it's going. What would help you to continue to take care of yourself?



Workshop participant's collage on finding community among the women she works with

Mapping a Community of Supports[1]

Ask each individual to make notes about or draw a picture of her community and all the individuals, resources, organizations, and special places that provide her with support and a sense of well-being. At the same time, make notes about or draw the community supports that you feel are available to both you and your program.

Prepare a large newsprint by taping several sheets together and post it on one wall in the room. Invite each person to share their information, either by reporting out to the group while you draw their supports on the large newsprint, or by drawing their supports themselves directly on the newsprint and explaining their drawing to the others. For example, if a student reports that the adult education program and a neighbor are her greatest sources of support, then you may draw or invite her to draw a picture of the adult education program and draw another picture of where her neighbor lives in relation to the adult education program.

Ask the next individual to build on what has gone before, adding to the supports or underscoring the ones that are duplicates. Your goal is to create a "community map of supports" that is a visual representation of the supports available to students and your program. One trick is to try to draw the map to scale. This may be a good math project, students could take the rough draft of the map and over time recreate it to scale.

Once everyone has added their supports to the collective map on the large newsprint, ask the group to discuss their experience and what they see. You can use such questions as the following:

- What was it like for you to try and identify your community supports?
- Are there any supports that anyone has mentioned that you are not familiar with?
- What do we notice about the community map?
- Where are our strongest supports located? What types of supports are these?
- Which supports work relatively well but could be strengthened?
- What type of support is absent or weak?
- What do we wish our map looked like?
- Are there any other resources or organizations in the community that may be a support but were not included?
- What about resources that may be much further away, for instance in another city, state, or even country? Does anyone have any "far away" supports? Can you explain how you feel supported when these resources are not close by? (Make sure to figure out a way to add these "far away" supports to your map as well.)

End by asking the entire group to consider how they will develop their own community supports either by adding supports or by strengthening the ones that they already have.

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[1] Adapted from: Nash, Andy. (Ed.) *Civic Participation and Community Action Sourcebook*, Boston: New England Literacy Resource Center, 1999:14.

Assessing Self-Care[1]

Are You Good to Yourself?

Many women treat their families and friends better than they treat themselves. You deserve the same good attention that you give to the people you love. Read the list below and rate how often you are good to yourself in these and other ways; then think about how you can be more loving to the most important person in your life — you!

Score each item as follows:
5 = Often 4 = Once in a while 3 = Hardly ever 2 = Never
1 = I never thought of it

_____ Eat regularly (breakfast, lunch, and dinner)
_____ Eat healthily
_____ Take vitamins
_____ Get enough sleep
_____ Shower or bathe regularly
_____ Wear clothes you like
_____ Care for hair and skin
_____ Exercise
_____ Do physical activity for fun (dance, swim, walk, play sports, etc.)
_____ Get regular medical check-ups
_____ Get medical care when needed
_____ Get extra rest when sick
_____ Be curious
_____ Learn new things
_____ Read for pleasure
_____ Express your creativity (writing, drawing, speaking, decorating, etc.)
_____ Sing or play music
_____ Spend time with people you like
_____ Avoid people who put you down
_____ Focus on your good qualities
_____ Talk with someone you trust about things that bother you
_____ Find things that make you laugh
_____ Allow yourself to cry
_____ Decrease stress in your life
_____ Help others when you can

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[1] Adapted by Amy Leos-Urbel and Selenia Vazquez, Care Center, Holyoke MA., from: Saakvitne, K.W. and L.A. Pearlman. *Transforming the Pain — A Workbook on Vacarious Traumatization.* New York: Norton, 1996:61–66.

Assessing Self-Care

_____ Ask for and accept help when you need it
_____ Make time for reflection
_____ Identify what is meaningful to you
_____ Find a spiritual connection or community
_____ Pray
_____ Meditate
_____ Find inspiration (in music, books, talks, etc.)
_____ Cherish your optimism and hope
_____ Other things you do for yourself:

_____ Other things you would like to do:

The activity above was adapted for students. Here are questions Amy and Selenia added when they did the Assessing Self-Care activity with the learning center staff. Think about how you would like to adapt this for your setting.

_____ Say no to extra responsibilities sometimes
_____ Take vacations
_____ Make time away from telephones
_____ Take a break during the workday (e.g., lunch)
_____ Make quiet time to complete tasks
_____ Identify projects or tasks that are exciting and rewarding
_____ Set limits with clients and colleagues
_____ Arrange your work space so it is comfortable and comforting
_____ Get regular supervision or consultation
_____ Negotiate for your needs (benefits, pay raise, etc.)
_____ Have a peer support group
_____ Make time for reflection
_____ Be open to not knowing
_____ Try at times not to be in charge or the expert
_____ Identify what is meaningful to you
_____ Contribute to causes in which you believe

Assessing Self-Care[1] (Spanish)

¿Eres Buena Contigo?

Muchas mujeres tratan a familiares y amistades mejor que a ellas misma. Te mereces la misma atención que le das a personas a quien tu amas. Lee la lista que aparece abajo y clasifica cuán a menudo eres buena contigo misma de esta y de otras maneras, piensa de que otras maneras puedes ser más amable con la persona mas importante en tu vida — Tú.

Clasifica cada tema de la siguiente manera:
5 = a menudo 4 = de vez en cuando 3 = casi nunca 2 = nunca
1 = nunca pensé en eso

____ Comes apropiadamente (desayuno, almuerzo y comida)
____ Comes comidas nutritivas
____ Tomas vitaminas
____ Duermes lo suficiente
____ Haces tiempo para bañarte con regularidad
____ Te vistes como a ti te gusta
____ Cuidas de tu pelo y uñas
____ Haces ejercicio
____ Participas en actividades que te divierten (bailar, nadar, caminar, jugar deportes, etc.)
____ Vas al doctor regularmente
____ Vas al doctor cuando estás en necesidad de asistencia médica
____ Descansas cuando estás enferma
____ Satisfaces tu necesidad de saber el porque de las cosas
____ Aprendes cosas nuevas
____ Lees por placer
____ Expresas tu creatividad (escribiendo, dibujando, hablando, etc.)
____ Cantas o escuchas música
____ Pasas tiempo con personas que son de tu agrado
____ Evitas a personas que te critican
____ Te enfocas en tus cualidades buenas
____ Hablas con alguien de confianza cuando hay algo que te molesta
____ Buscas entretenimiento en cosas que te hacen reir
____ Te permites llorar
____ Reduces el estrés en tu vida
____ Ayudas a otros cuando puedes

---

[1] Adapted by Amy Leos-Urbel and Selenia Vazquez, Care Center, Holyoke MA., from: Saakvitne, K.W. and L.A. Pearlman. *Transforming the Pain — A Workbook on Vacarious Traumatization.* New York: Norton, 1996:61–66.

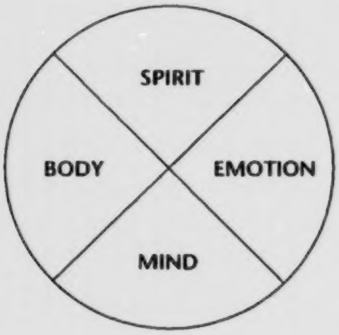
Assessing Self-Care (Spanish)

____ Pides y aceptas ayuda cuando la necesitas
____ Te niegas aceptar responsabilidades adicionales (puedes decir NO)
____ Haces tiempo para reflexionar en las cosas
____ Te vas de vacaciones
____ Sacas tiempo en que NO contestas el teléfono
____ Tomas una pausa durante el día de trabajo (irte a almorzar, etc.)
____ Sacas tiempo especifico y tranquilo para que puedas terminar alguna tarea especial
____ Tomas tiempo e identificas projectos que te son emocionantes y provechosos
____ Fijas límites con tus clientes y colegas
____ Arreglas el area donde tu trabajas para te sea comodo y alentador
____ Con regularidad, tienes tiempo para supervición, o para hablar con una consultante
____ Haces negociaciones de tus necesidades (como beneficios, aumento de salario, etc.)
____ Tienes un grupo de apollo con tus contemporáneos
____ Haces tiempo para reflexionar en las cosas
____ Aceptas el hecho de que tú NO lo sabes todo
____ Tratas a veces de no ser la encargada, o de no ser la experta
____ Identificas lo que en verdad tiene significado para ti
____ Contribuyes hacia causas en las que en verdad crees y que te son de interés
____ Buscas una conexión espiritual o una conexión en tu comunidad
____ Oras
____ Meditas
____ Buscas inspiración (en la musica, libros, hablando, etc.)
____ Amas tu optimismo y tus esperanzas
____ Te esfuerzas por tener balance entre tu vida en el mundo del trabajo y tu día de trabajo
____ Te esfuerzas por tener balance entre tu trabajo, familia, relación con otras personas, entretenimiento, descanso
____ Qué otras cosas haces para ti:

____ Qué otras cosas te gustaría hacer para ti:

Bringing the Whole Person to Learning

Traditional teaching teaches predominantly to the mind, often to the neglect of the emotions, the spirit, and the body. Yet all are important and intertwined. Each affects the other and each shapes what is learned and how one learns. When we consider that violence affects the "whole person," it follows that teaching and learning must also include the whole person.



How do we support the growth and development of these four aspects of self, not only in students, but also in ourselves? How do we model self-care to encourage students to do the same? What kinds of supports can be made available in programs to help us work from a place of wholeness and wellness, rather than scarcity and overload?

Here are some of the supports that teachers in this project have created for themselves to promote their own well being and, in turn, that of students:

- Hiring a counselor to work with staff and students.
- Convening a study circle or having regular meetings with a colleague outside the program to talk through the complexities of addressing issues of violence.
- Taking time to eat lunch or go for a walk.
- Organizing a retreat to plan programming in a beautiful setting.
- Recognizing that self-care, such as exercise, meditation, and expressive arts, enable them to take on this difficult work.

What kinds of supports do you have or do you want to develop to nurture your "whole person" in your workplace?

Examples from Programs

Study Circle

Each of the programs formed a different type of study circle or group. Some met with staff from their agencies, others met with other local community workers, and some combined the two. The study groups were used for support, reflection, planning, and sharing resources. We have included a detailed description as an example of how one program formed their group.

Getting Ready to Work, Vermont Adult Learning

Our staff developed a list of people we hoped would participate in our Study Circle, and everyone we invited expressed enthusiastic interest. In the past, our collaborations had focused on joint programs, sharing resources, making service dollars stretch farther. Our Study Circle's purpose was to provide a pause for reflection, a support for our work with issues of violence.

We met for two hours on four occasions, and otherwise kept in touch through e-mail or by phone. Time for lunch and collegial conversation was a double treat. The core group of our Study Circle continued to meet throughout the year, and others joined us as the year progressed. Participants included:

Nancy Metz — Community Liaison for the Domestic Violence Unit, Windsor County State's Attorney's Office. Passionately committed to addressing issues of women and violence.

Past participant in Getting Ready to Work — Willing to use personal experience of the cost of violence to herself and her family to heal and to help others.

Lynn Moody — Reach Up, Department of Social Welfare. Worked directly with many of our participants with a compassionate touch.

Donna Nestle — Direct Service Coordinator at WISE. An advisor and spirited advocate for anyone dealing with violence.

Anne Bridges — Vocational Rehabilitation. A job counselor who felt violence had a silent impact on her clients' success and wanted to learn how to be more helpful.

Wynona Ward — Attorney, Have Justice Will Travel. Developed an innovative program where she travels to women's homes to provide professional legal help at no cost.

Current Participant — A student at a community college with intelligent and keen perceptions about the legacy of violence.

The First Meeting: Getting Started

Prior to the meeting, we mailed an invitation letter with a copy of Jenny Horsman's "But I'm Not a Therapist — The Challenge of Creating Effective Literacy Learning for Survivors of Trauma."

We opened the first Study Circle with introductions where we shared ideas and talked about how this group circle could be most helpful to each of us. This is what people said:

> I know this is an issue for people I serve, but I don't hear about it. How can I know what to say? I'm not a therapist but I want to be supportive.
>
> We need to identify the agencies that can offer support of all kinds. What can they do?
>
> What about the combination of drinking and depression? How do women find the help they need?
>
> I'd like to go in-depth on the barriers.
>
> I look forward to networking.
>
> I'm interested in the psychology of violence. These stories are difficult to hear. What are recommendations about helping? Let's share resources.
>
> Why the hell does the Vermont system let victims fall through the cracks?

We decided to send flyers to all our participants about a kick-off event for Domestic Violence Awareness month.

The Second Meeting: Building Connections

As an opener, we gave updates on our respective programs, and shared books, articles, poems, and sayings related to violence that we had found helpful.

Wynona couldn't attend so she sent an e-mail:

> In his poem, "The Road Not Taken," Vermont's poet Laureate, Robert Frost, writes about taking the road less traveled which made all the difference in his life. I see myself traveling down that road. A different road from my ancestors, where spouse abuse and child abuse are no longer acceptable. A road where the generational cycle of abuse no longer exists. And when I reach the end of that road, I want to be able to say that I did all I could in my life to stop family violence and end the generational cycle of abuse in this world.

Nancy Metz reported on an upcoming panel presentation on family violence. Thanks to our connection through the Study Circle we had received early notice of this event, circulated flyers, and planned to attend as a group. The members of our small group were almost the only attendants at the event despite lots of advertising. The upset and frustration from such poor attendance led to many thoughtful conversations about "why" there were not more people there.

We studied Chapter 5, "Learning in the Context of Trauma: The Challenge of Setting Goals" from Jenny Horsman's book *Too Scared to Learn*. Then Dede led an exciting discussion and brainstorm session about the needs of women in the Upper Valley.

The Third Meeting: A Viewing of *Together We Bloom*

Two women from the welfare office in Springfield, Vermont joined our third Study Circle. We began with introductions. Then each person chose an object that represented something about them from a basket of small, random items. We had done this at a recent training institute and had lots of fun.

We updated the Circle on our upcoming plans for the Well-Being Support Group and our participation in the International Conference on Women and Literacy.

Following this we introduced the *Together We Bloom* video and study guide, and created our own ground rules for watching disturbing material. As we ate lunch, we watched segments of the video, stopping to check in with each other periodically.

The Fourth Meeting: Sharing Resources on Trauma and Healing

There were more new people, so we began with a conversation about our relationship as a Study Circle, its journey and purpose, and the commitment each of the members has to working on issues of family and community violence. We shared resources about trauma. Tammy presented information from a workshop on Peter Levine's paper *Healing Trauma: Restoring the Wisdom of the Body*.[1]

These are some of the things learned from the Study Circle experience:

> Study Circle members are committed to working on issues of violence as a vocational calling. Members of the study circle often eat irregular meals, lead interrupted lives, keep late hours, and live with a high degree of stress.
>
> Meeting together in a more "kicked back" format was a treat for all of us and we all enjoyed getting to know each other better.
>
> The Circle prized the opportunity to eat together and explore new ideas and resources with colleagues.
>
> Inevitably, one or more of our participants would schedule an appointment with Wynona (the attorney) afterwards or use the occasion to informally ask about a personal problem.
>
> Our participants were treated as equal Circle members with valuable experiences and perspectives.
>
> The Study Circle served as a resource and support to both our staff and our participants. They made themselves available to give advice, and our common bond made it easier to make referrals to services.

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[1] Levine, Peter A. *Healing Trauma, Restoring Wisdom of the Body*. Boulder, CO: True Sounds, 1999. 1-800-333-9185. For other writings by Peter A. Levine see his book *Waking the Tiger: Healing Trauma: The Innate Capacity to Transform Overwhelming Experiences*. Berkeley CA: North Atlantic Books, 1997, and articles on the web http://www.traumahealing.com/articles.htm

> The Study Circle seemed to create its own energy. New people "discovered" us and wanted to visit. We were pleased that new people wanted to join us and that this project was generating excitement. However, new participation disrupted the intimate conversation that we had begun, and we had to spend part of our limited time recreating the context.

Support Group

Each program had groups with their learners (see Chapter 3, Examples from Programs). The Women's Well-Being Support Group illustrates how a group can provide self-care and professional development for the teachers as well as students.

Getting Ready to Work, Vermont Adult Learning

The Women's Well-Being Support Group met once a week, as part of our welfare-to-work training program called Getting Ready to Work. The purpose of the group was to help women build skills for negotiating the legacy of violence in their lives. Too often we had watched our participants' long-term success with both learning and work goals compromised by what we now recognize as the prolonged effects of trauma. Jenny Horsman's research on this topic, presented in *Too Scared to Learn,* served as a guide for reflecting on our learner's needs as we designed the curriculum and developed a new framework for outcomes.

The Well-Being Group was a learning experience for staff as well as learners. We hired "experts" and participated as equals in the classes. We learned about healing arts and more importantly, learning. We used our own responses — irritation, frustration, or delight — as valuable information about teaching. We noticed how the classes impacted us, how we worked and communicated. We asked a lot of questions of each other and our participants. Trust and mutual appreciation grew.

As a staff, we wondered how the classes might help us, too, at our work and in our lives. How did we, as a staff, participate in continuing violence to each other and to those we most wished to serve? What if even our planning for the Well-Being Group was done in a way that promoted our well-being? Instead of frustrating, rushed sessions to plan the program, we went on a retreat, pampered ourselves with delicious food, flowers, and thoughtfulness. Instead of buying into the pressures of the human services' mind-set of "too much to do with too little time," we paid attention to taking better care of ourselves on a day-to-day basis. For example, how radical to encourage each other to take regular lunches! What a difference a meal makes!

Chapter Three

Reform Programming

Introduction
    Acknowledge Violence
    Create the Conditions for Learning
    Change Curriculum
    References

Tools for Programs: Reflect and Take Action
    Making Programming Choices

Examples from Programs
    Program Groups

Introduction

In addition to making connections inside and outside the program there are several aspects of the program itself that can support learning for survivors of violence. To create an environment that supports learning for all

> name the presence of violence in many women's lives and its impact on learning;
>
> create supportive conditions for learning; and
>
> explore curriculum that invites learners to bring their whole selves to learning.

In this chapter we will explore what each of these might look like in the day-to-day reality of a program, and how they can be combined to create a program where a woman's experience of violence is not something secret and shameful, and where the educational setting and processes support learning and healing. In this way, instead of learners struggling to cope with an educational institution where the realities of their lives are not acknowledged, women can bring their whole selves to learning and may learn with more success than they had imagined possible.

Acknowledge Violence

Perhaps the most challenging aspect of reforming a program is acknowledging or naming violence. As the Women, Violence, and Adult Education project progressed, we came to realize that naming violence was a complex issue and we began to doubt the initial assumption some of us had made that it meant talking explicitly about violence in literacy classes.

What we need to address is the silence about violence in literacy programs. This silence is part of the invisibility of violence everywhere, and becomes habitual for us all. Even though individual instructors may hear stories or have suspicions about the violence in the lives of students and colleagues, there is rarely public talk about violence, rarely any clear statements that violence is not OK, rarely any exploration of how violence can impact on learning in a range of ways.

Workshop participant's collage exploring the silence about violence and acknowledging the impact on women's lives

Perhaps the first step in acknowledging violence is opening up discussion among staff and student leaders to develop approaches that build on their own style and culture to

publicly recognize the presence of violence in many lives;

make issues of violence visible so that individual women's experiences of violence, in their past or present, are not seen as shameful events;[1]

acknowledge that experiences of violence change people in many ways and can make it harder to learn; and

support the safety, well-being, and learning of staff and students.

If we think of a continuum that has at one end complete silence about violence and at the other a counseling group where the full stories of violence are told, literacy programs need to explore "space" in the middle. This middle space is defined by practices that avoid complicity in the silences that contribute to individual shame, while staying focused on educational goals. Such a space may enable some students to also access counseling or other resources which make it possible for them to address their own histories, or to become activists taking on the broader social issues of violence and its effect on society. But the core of the program can be the creation of a healing educational setting that supports learning.

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[1] For an in-depth discussion of school-induced shame and the impact on learning, see Shelton, Leslie. "The Heart of Literacy: Transforming School-Induced Shame and Recovering the Competent Self." Phd. dissertation. The Union Institute, 2001.

During the project we saw firsthand that naming the presence of violence does not need to mean creating a curriculum that focuses directly on violence, although sometimes the conditions in a particular program may lead in that direction. When the conditions are right, anti-violence curriculum can form the basis for exciting activism. Several programs have created products such as a play, video, or presentation to take into the community to educate others. (See page 131 at the end of this chapter for more detail.) Naming violence also does not necessarily mean becoming a therapy group or a place to invite full disclosures of past or present violence. Only when the conditions make that viable (staff with counseling skills and support) and essential (because of the absence of adequate resources in the neighbouring community) is that direction a likely choice for a literacy program.

Although it is extremely important to break the silences around violence, if a group focuses directly on violence, women who have experienced violence may not want to attend. Some women will feel it's not for them, even when they are experiencing violence. Some may not want others to know about their experiences; others may feel they already have far too much violence in their lives and want school to be a place where they can escape thinking about it. One way to draw more women in to a group is to focus on well-being and to create a learning environment that is as safe as possible.

The staff from Vermont Getting Ready to Work explored what a focus on wellbeing could look like in their programs. While they chose to focus on "growth and healing" and explored a range of activities to promote well-being, they were careful to also name the presence of violence. In their guiding values for the group, they said that they would "explain trauma to people, talk about it, externalize it." They would ask, "What is it? What is it like? How does it get us?" With this approach, Katy Chaffee found that she heard no more stories about violence than before but students' needs for telling their stories seemed to have shifted. Previously Katy felt she was told stories as part of students' desire that she "fix it." With a more conscious focus on wellness, the references to women's experiences were simply part of acknowledging their life experiences.

The Community Education Project and Genesis created groups that they hoped would open up discussion about the violence in women's lives. At Genesis, they decided to start a women's quilting group where discussing issues of violence could be a regular feature. When Michele Rajotte and Gloria Caprio of Genesis Center first started to focus on violence with the women's quilting group they found it hard to choose the materials:

> *To prepare for the class, I reviewed educational films about domestic violence and decided not to use them in the quilting class. I felt that the content was too severe and the language too difficult. I also felt that I needed to begin slowly and to start where the learners were. I searched for films that would encourage discussion and felt that a story or biography would be interesting to everyone.*

> *Gloria and I decided to begin one class with the film* Sleeping With the Enemy. *This film portrays a couple in a jealous and abusive relationship, and is graphic. I did consider that the male character's abusive behavior might be too much for some learners; however, I decided to take that chance. The class was silent as we observed the loving relationship develop into one of fear and violence. The learners were absorbed. We chose to stop it after 15 minutes, enough time to understand what had happened and what might happen. Some students could not understand the dialogue, so Gloria took some time to explain what they needed to know. Conversation began with the learners speaking about their friends and relatives and specific situations in their native countries. The question of a woman's strength was woven throughout our dialogue. Where did this character in the movie find the strength to leave? What makes you feel strong? When are you the strongest?*
>
> *The class continued with a biographical film about the country singer Patsy Cline, who had experienced domestic violence in her life. As she became more popular, her husband's behavior became more aggressive and possessive. The class was interested in this film, but said that they wanted to speak about different things. "Violence is depressing. Let's talk about something else." We knew it was time to change the topic.* **(Michele)**

In spite of students' desire not to speak about their own experiences with violence, Bernice Morris, another staff member at Genesis, felt students were eager to learn more about violence issues and available resources without feeling pressured to self-disclose:

> *Students may not want to talk about violence, but when somebody came in and talked about it, you could hear a pin drop in the room. They wanted to know everything, but they did not want to say anything about their own families. A bilingual woman came in from the Women's Center of Rhode Island. A lot of Spanish-speaking folks were at the presentation. She talked about the cycle of violence, some services that are available and she also had two of the learners do a role-play. One of the players had left an abusive relationship and had volunteered to do the play because she wanted to show everyone that what she was acting out was wrong and you did not have to live like that. Everybody in the room was captivated. I had struggled to get people to start thinking about how violence affects their lives, but what we were doing was obviously having an effect when sometimes we thought it was not.* **(Bernice)**

When activities such as creative projects were offered to provide "spaciousness," students naturally talked about their experiences:

> *Sometimes it was very quiet while the women focused on their quilting, but inevitably, conversations would spring up naturally. They would talk about their families and their children. They would talk about cultural differences. Because there was no structure, the conversation just went where the students wanted it to go.* **(Michele)**

At the Community Education Project in Holyoke, Maria Salgado was able to build on the program's long-standing commitment to activism and community development to work towards women becoming active agents of change:

> *Violence is a disease in our community...so rampant that people are desensitized. It's an everyday thing. When I was recruiting, I told them it was a group of women who are trying to improve the quality of their lives through education. But of course violence came up and I tried to structure some of the activities so that it would.*
>
> *In the first cycle, we had the Community Education Coordinator come and tell us about making a safe plan, getting a restraining order, negotiating the judicial system. We also addressed issues of violence more indirectly. We read poetry. We did collages. We did fun learning activities. We critiqued music and even wrote music. We ended up talking a lot about violence.*
>
> *The women in my community are very poor and virtually all of them have experienced violence. So, when I gave them the chance to talk to each other, violence came up. Like when we were listening to music. There's this one song on the radio that everyone listens to, dances to. The words are, "If I catch you flirting with someone, I'll kill you." So I wrote out the words and the women really listened to the song for the first time and then wrote about their feelings.*
>
> *Having women of different generations in the second cycle turned out to be really good. The older women could mentor the younger women around issues of violence. Some really listened, others said, "I'll learn on my own." And then, several tragedies occurred in the community that impacted the women in the group. One woman's 14-year-old son committed suicide. And then there was a series of gang-related murders. So violence was a big issue that came up just in the natural course of things.* **(Maria)**

When the presence of violence in women's lives is recognized, women's lack of attention, absences, or difficulty learning will be understood differently by educators than when such behavior is simply assumed to indicate a lack of motivation or ability. When women are given information about the range of resources available in the community, they may find the supports they need to address issues that are making it hard for them to learn. Though students may not want a direct focus on violence, it may be crucial for learning that they have opportunities to heal.

> *The students do not like to see pictures about violence; they are afraid to speak about their children, uncles, etc., but they want to hear how they can learn to heal.* **(Gloria)**

When women can bring their whole selves to learning, including the strengths and difficulties that result from past or present violence, and expect empathy and support from their peers and instructors, they do not have to expend energy hiding what they have been through. Then they may be able to believe in themselves enough to learn.

Create the Conditions for Learning

Creating appropriate conditions for learning may be especially crucial for a woman who has been through violence as she may assume that any difficulty she has learning is simply the result of her being stupid, incapable of learning, worthless. When someone with a strong sense of self-worth has trouble learning, she may assume that it is a poor course, a poor teacher, or a teaching approach that doesn't work for her, but a more vulnerable person is often quick to assume she is at fault.

Some basic conditions that help a person feel worthy and capable of learning include

trust
safety
beauty
inspiration
nourishment
a balance of silence, talk, listening to music
ownership
space for reflection

Creating these conditions may be challenging in adult education programs, often sharply at odds with the expectations of funders, administrators, teachers, and sometimes even students. Some institutions have highly structured conditions, many of which may not support learning. Educators in prisons, for example, have to contend with many aspects of the setting that are not conducive to learning and may actually be violent and violating. Even community programs, which may seem kinder, more comfortable settings for learning, often have a hard time creating appropriate conditions. They may often be contending with the culture of deficit, self-sacrifice, making do with the bare minimum that limited funding creates, and being dependant on the expectations of funders.

Trust and Safety

Creating a safe learning environment will encourage women to let their guard down and open up to learning. Once trust has been built, they can learn in safety and without humiliation or put-downs. When women are questioning how much of themselves and their life experiences to bring into the program, confidentiality and respect may be crucial to their sense of safety. When programs are tied to government policies that women experience as abusive, for instance, unrealistic time requirements or required reporting of attendance or behavior, creating a safe and nurturing environment can be a huge challenge.

Many women who have been mistreated and marginalized throughout life will behave in ways that others find difficult to cope with. In a nurturing environment, women may compete for the good things available — the instructor's attention, the food, materials — never having had enough of these things in their lives. Some women may want to tell their stories, but others may not want to hear them, for the stories may be too disturbing, bringing back their own buried experiences. Having been betrayed and violated before, many women may be waiting to be judged or betrayed, or they may be terrified of letting others know about themselves.

One practical step towards creating greater safety in the group can be an agreement the group makes together about such issues as competing pain and confidentiality. Maria at CEP worked with the women in her group to create an agreement they could all sign on to.

> *After breakfast, which we had at every session, we discussed our purpose and established some guidelines for the group. The goals were to bring cohesion to the group and avoid conflict during times of discussion. The guidelines for the group were repeated several times during the first few weeks, particularly for women who were participating for the first time.* **(Maria)**

Here are the guidelines the women agreed to at CEP:

1. ***Confidentiality*** (extremely important!): What is discussed in the group must stay in the group. If this is violated for any reason, the woman who breaks confidentiality will be lovingly and respectfully confronted in the group, and will apologize. If it happens twice, the woman will be asked to leave the group.
2. ***Respect***: The opinions of each member are valued and respected. We will keep in mind at all times that we all have our own quirks — none of us is perfect.
3. ***Sensitivity/not judging***: We will remember that none of us has the same history, and we cannot judge another member negatively for her handling of a situation. We will not accept negative, judgmental statements like, "You were stupid" or "I wouldn't do it that way."
4. ***Not competing***: This is not a question of who has the worst story. For example, we won't say things like, "You think that's bad? Look what happened to me!"
5. ***Communication***: It's important that if something that one of us doesn't like happens in the group, we tell the group how we feel. If we don't feel comfortable bringing it up ourselves, we can mention it to another member and give her the authority to bring it up. But if that authority is not given, it's not okay for her to bring it up.
6. ***Being positive***: We've all suffered a lot. We want to have a positive feeling among us.
7. ***Good listening***: We remember that being a good listener implies talking only about 20 percent of the time, and listening for the other 80 percent.
8. ***Punctuality***: It's important that everyone comes on time, and that we finish on time. Maria will be at the meeting site by 9:30 A.M. in case anyone wants to come early. The group will begin working at 10:00 A.M. sharp.

9. ***Responsibility***: From time to time members will have things to do outside our meetings. Each member will be responsible for her own contribution to the group.
10. ***Commitment***: Each of us commits herself to participate in the group from the time we join until the last group meeting. We will take a brief break from our weekly meetings over the holidays.

Each woman signed her agreement with these guidelines. Guidelines may help create a sense of safety, but they can also be disturbing in themselves. At Vermont Adult Learning, Tammy Stockman talked of how there was heated discussion when staff raised the issue of guidelines because students did not want more rules in their lives. They eventually decided on a list of "common courtesies" they could all agree to.

Creating safe space is an evolving process of trying things out and paying close attention to student reactions.

> *When we first started the group, we just put chairs in a circle and cushions in the middle of the classroom. Students came in and they were upset that we had taken the tables away. Then we got thinking about how the table is a protection; people can only get so close to you, they cannot see your whole body and you can put things on the tables. We were practically asking them to sit bare and that was why they felt uncomfortable.* **(Tammy)**

> *I thought we had done a lot to make a safe space before this group. Then I realized that we had not even touched it.... We kept trying things that would increase people's sense of safety, tiny details.... We became very familiar with little subtleties of how people indicated that they didn't feel safe. We had had a consistent problem with a lot of giddiness, laughing, not staying on track.... But when we took the additional steps of deciding that we weren't going to be interrupted, by unplugging the phone and locking the door, their whole demeanor and attitude changed. There was less giddiness, they could concentrate for longer, and it was more clearly their choice whether or not they could be present.*
>
> *We reflected on the group at the end and talked about not having personal space in their lives. [The program] was a place where they did have space. So coming to the well-being group began to be about people claiming personal space for themselves and it made a difference. I think that was a positive outcome — the awareness that [personal space gave them] pleasure.* **(Katy)**

> *When the door was locked, the phones turned off, and the fear of being interrupted eliminated, when the collective act of self-care was given top priority and the rest of the world sent a clear message that this was our space and time, that was when we felt a sense of well-being. And that was when trust was built.* **(Tammy)**

Paying careful attention to issues of trust and safety may gradually open up a whole range of ways that trust can be developed both within the group and within the broader program. Seeing safety as a necessary condition for learning and looking at all the ways a sense of safety and well-being can be developed may lead to unexpected possibilities for learning.

Beauty, Inspiration, and Nourishment

Beauty, inspiration, and nourishment can have a remarkable effect on learning. Many things that might be thought of as luxuries can have more impact on learning than we think. For instance, flowers may seem like an extravagance, but they can create beauty and instill hope, and through helping students to feel valued and worthy, support students to gradually believe in themselves and their ability to learn. Similarly, food may be seen as something needed to feed the body and support the mind, but its effect of nourishing the emotions and spirit may be equally powerful.

Programs that participated in the Women, Violence, and Adult Education project used project funding to experiment with different ways of creating beauty, inspiration, and nourishment. Without access to these funds, the expenditures may not have been seen as legitimate. Instructors were able to offer an abundance of beautiful food and flowers and observe the effect this had on students and themselves. Workers described the flowers as a "metaphor for students' own growth, their own lives." Transforming spaces with lace curtains, easy chairs, beautiful and inspiring pictures contributed to the transformation of people. Even in a maximum-security prison, the York School staff managed to create a special space for learning. Leslie Ridway, the social teacher and co-teacher of the writing group, said,

> *In the book* Too Scared to Learn, *Jenny Horsman explores the difficulty in learning by those who have been traumatized. An important premise of the book is to create a safe space where learning and healing can take place. With this in mind we brought lace tablecloths, pillows, pretty quilts, and fresh flowers to the classroom where the group would gather. We also created a comfortable space outside the circle of chairs in case any group member needed to remove herself from the group but did not wish to leave the room.* **(Leslie)**

They even brought in scented hand cream, a usually forbidden treat, so that students could enjoy a dab at the end of each class. This balm became a contested privilege in the prison setting which perhaps made its value even greater. Eventually the program staff got permission to provide students access to this symbol of the women's beauty and worth in the classroom.

The staff at Vermont Adult Learning also brought beautiful things into the classroom and found students joining in:

> *We started putting flowers in the middle of the classroom with candles. Then [a student] brought in cushions. [She] also brought in poetry, which she shared in class. Then people started bringing in things that they had written, things that they hung in their houses, poems, etc.* **(Katy)**

Classroom inspiration

At Project Hope they also took on the major task of transforming the teaching space. Char began the process by asking students to envision what they would like the room to look like and to draw pictures of what they imagined. She asked, "If you could have anything you wanted in this room, what would it be?" After the students let their imagination run wild and drew pictures, staff, students, and volunteers worked on the room all summer based on what the students had said they wanted. (For a detailed description of how the space was transformed, see page 42.)

Char and Anna observed that transforming the physical space also transformed the "inner spiritual space" of the women:

> *When the year began, we noticed a complete change in people's attitudes. They were much more relaxed, much calmer.* **(Anna)**

The opportunity to make change in this way allowed the workers and the students some "space" outside the everyday experience of violence. Char brought luxurious food each week. Gradually groups of students started coming in early to prepare food for all the students. Char argued that the food fed far more than the body:

> *Food has symbolic meaning. Food as nurturance has been an important part of the program. People feel taken care of.* **(Char)**

In many programs students became involved in the process of creating a special, even sacred, space for their learning, choosing colors, offering labor, or bringing in things they thought would contribute to the atmosphere. Beauty and nurturance can open up a sense of self-worth for women who have experienced little abundance in their lives. These "luxuries" may support women's learning by offering them a new self-image of being somebody, being worth something, being able to learn and make changes in their lives.

Silence, Talk, Music

Some women like to work in silence, some like to talk, and others appreciate listening to music. Different forms of music can feed the spirit, stir the emotions, or calm the mind. Because some women want to listen to music or chat during an activity, and others would prefer silence, reaching a compromise can be complicated.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, at Vermont Adult Learning, Joan, the collage instructor, believed in the value of working in silence, so the women initially worked in silence. Then they explored other alternatives:

> *Sometimes, when Joan was not attending, the group decided to talk while working. In one session, we agreed to talk for half the time; however, in the end, the talking lasted about 15 minutes. Then we decided to try music with no talking. Group participants had strong feelings about silence, noise, and music. We used several types of music on two occasions — a tape of Native American flute music called* Spirit Feathers, *one titled* Celtic Charm, *and Enya's* Shepherd's Moon. *Music provided a middle ground for those who wanted to talk while they worked and those who wanted absolute silence. The "talkers" complained less about not talking and seemed to focus more on their work.*
>
> *Joan commented that she never used music, with others or by herself. "One of my concerns is that music evokes a mood, and I wonder about the degree to which it influences the person's work. In the silence, you really have to respond to what is inside you."* **(Katy)**

The experience of alternating between music, talk, and silence gave students more information about themselves and their creative process:

> **Katrina:** *I don't like the quiet. I'm more creative when there's noise around, so it was frustrating for me the few times I did come, even though I liked being here. The quiet made it very hard to concentrate on the picture.*
>
> **Cherie:** *I could do it both ways, quiet and not quiet. So I liked it when we could have some quiet and then some not quiet. The music was nice.*
>
> **Katy:** *What was the difference?*
>
> **Cherie:** *I got to go inside myself instead of everybody else [murmur of general agreement] and I liked it there 'cause it was peaceful. When you're doing things like making a collage, it's peaceful and I got to think of new creative ways to handle hard situations. It's a wonderful therapy. I think they have a lot of self-help groups for people with mental illness and I think something like this is a heck of a lot better than sitting around a table*

discussing why you're sick. I enjoyed it.... I knew every day when I came in here what I wanted to make. Before I even came in here, I knew the mood I was in, and the way I wanted to make it, who I wanted to make it for, and what it was about. I didn't just cut pictures out.

Tracy: *When I started, I thought we should have noise, but after being here a couple of times, I decided that I do like the quiet. The one time we had music (Enya), I came in and started to do something different. Because it was solemn music, I ended up with a solemn picture. And I really enjoyed that class a lot.*

Cherie: *That music didn't change my design. I continued doing what I was doing when I started.*

Diane: *I liked the silence more than the talking, and I loved it when we played the music. One day when I came in, I was going to do baby girls, and I ended up doing another one representing me and my son. It was serene for me, listening to music at the same time.*

Jane: *To me, noise, talking, or silence didn't matter. But I noticed that on the days when it was silent, even if I thought I knew what I was going to do, that was apt to change. Like the day I did the food. That was not what I planned, but food ended up being all I cut out.*

Experimenting with silence, talk, and different kinds of music can provide room for reflection, which may be a rarity in many women's lives. It can also provide beauty, comfort, and an atmosphere that stimulates learning.

Anna Yangco's "4-stringed voice" brought space for joy and reflection to the workshops

A Sense of Ownership and Space for Reflection

Staff and students at WVAE programs explored ways of transforming space and creating beauty and a sense of expansiveness. Staff invited learners to dream and participate in these transformation processes and watched as students made use of the space in new ways.

Students were also invited in to play leadership roles and participate in decision making. At CEP, the entire women's group interviewed counselors and chose whom to hire. At the prison, graduates of the Struggles writing group paired up to lead a new writing group, with the support of the instructors.

Katy described how the students in Vermont took over their learning center:

> *They owned that space: they made curtains, they painted the door, they brought rugs for the bathroom. There was a whole thing that happened around ownership. They loved to hang around there. They shared things that they had never talked about before — stories about violence, about what was going on in their lives. It seemed to integrate their experiences of violence into who they were and what they were planning to do with their lives. It was very rich. That group wanted to continue the class and set the stage for moving on.* **(Katy)**

The group that took part in the collage-making course also reflected on the sense of space in that course:

> *We tried a variety of room arrangements to maximize people's personal space, although our meeting room is small. Joan Burch recommends having as large a work area for each person as possible, even using the floor if necessary. For example, two people to a table would be great. Collaging is expansive work. In an adequate setting, people are better able to focus on their own work, to be drawn into deeper levels of themselves. The creative power has space to move into.* **(Katy)**
>
> *When I was doing a collage, I wanted to spread everything out [on the paper]. I finally realized it's because my life is so cluttered that I didn't want any of my pictures to touch anything else, even though they looked better when they did.* **(Jane)**

When students are able to experience personal space, this may lead to important discoveries:

> *They had the personal space and they found out that they have the ability to think. When they needed to figure out something, they tended to come to our place to do that, because that was their space.* **(Tammy)**

Sadly, current welfare-to-work programs, with their restricted funding and their narrow focus on rapidly getting women into the workplace, are moving in the opposite direction, away from exploring reflective space. Yet the experience of the Vermont Getting Ready to Work program suggests that a narrow focus simply makes it harder for women to even know who they are, let alone know what they might do in the workplace, or how to obtain and keep paid work.

At Project Hope, Char and Anna also experienced challenges securing sacred space and having other staff honor it:

> *Because we're in a shelter, there's always traffic and noises, so I liked the downstairs room because it was more private, with less distraction. We fixed up the room with collages, making it a much warmer space.* **(Char)**

Staff members did not understand the value of students being able to simply spend quiet time in the space even when they were not taking part in a class. Nor was it easy to explain that it was the calm and peaceful atmosphere that contributed to learning:

> *People have fought over this room. Ever since we beautified it, everyone wants to meet here. It has to do with power and politics, and we are looking into how we share space in a new way.*
>
> *[We want to operate from an] abundance model rather than the poverty model that perpetuates the violence. I believe that there is enough for everyone as long as we share it. There are violent acts of fighting for space, but we all need to cherish it. There are a lot of bad feelings that have arisen through fighting about the space.*
>
> *How do you get women to take ownership of the transformation of their lives? The building is a blueprint of the person and the person is a sacred space. There are parallels between the person and the space. The arrangements of the room illustrate how we are feeling inside: if it's a chaotic room, we probably feel chaotic.*
>
> *We were not the only ones using the space, and one time a number of journals disappeared. The women who lost journals were some of the most vulnerable. I betrayed these women because I said that this room was safe, and this was early on in the school year, so they had just started writing in their journals. A whole bunch of stuff was taken, CDs, etc. I'm still processing for myself how I felt violated from this experience.* **(Char)**

In spite of setbacks, the women gradually made use of the space:

> *More and more women were coming in early, making coffee, reading magazines, and using the computer. The space was becoming what we wanted it to be. Nothing could stop it from happening.* **(Char)**

The competing desires to use the space made its value abundantly clear:

> *Project Hope is expanding and they've asked Char to help design the new space. One thing she's pushing for is a meditation room. If we get that, then people will have a soothing place to go besides our classroom.* **(Anna)**

Working on a creative activity as a group can also provide spaciousness. Bernice, at Genesis, noted how this led students to support each other:

> *[Students] offered help when someone in the group needed it. For example, two women in this group lost their home. Everyone in the class wanted to help and they called all the people that they could think of, they gathered some food, some clothes, shelter, money.... I think that created a very strong connection between them.* **(Bernice)**

At Vermont Adult Learning, Tammy was fascinated to see how the women who participated in the mindfulness group were also able to pass on the gift of abundance to other students during a party they held at the end of the year:

> *Our mindfulness group automatically took on the role of hosting the party. They put up decorations and greeted others as they came through the door. The atmosphere was one of warmth and plenty. When a woman who had not attended the mindfulness group came in to say that she would not be able to join us, members of our little group convinced her to stay through a show of genuine caring. It was as if through our mindfulness and the making of a sacred, shared space, our participants had become "full" enough to spontaneously share what they had found. What had been found was a sense of our own inner wisdom and ability to love ourselves and thereby to love others.* **(Tammy)**

Creating a beautiful "space" for the body, mind, emotions, and spirit — both the physical space of a beautiful room and the mental and emotional space — encourages everyone to expand and dream, opening up new possibilities for being and for learning. It can support students in imagining the possibility of transforming themselves.

Change Curriculum

During the WVAE project, each program started a new group. For some, the focus was on a particular activity, such as writing, yoga, meditation, visual arts, issues of violence. For others, it was a more general women's support group. Some programs tried a whole series of groups so that they could reach different students, or test out different approaches. All the program workers reported the new energy level among the women and were convinced that each approach supported learning. Comments from students uniformly supported this view. Women seemed more able to be present, to learn, and to imagine change in their lives. (For detailed accounts of each of these groups, written by the instructors, along with comments from students, see Examples from Programs at the end of this chapter.)

Writing

Writing groups are already a common element of many adult literacy programs, but these groups often focus less on content than on writing "correctly." Many students may question how much of themselves to bring to the writing process when it does not seem a safe place to write about what they have experienced in their lives. In contrast, in programs where the presence of violence has been named, a writing group can provide a wonderful environment for women to write about their lives. It can allow them to learn about themselves as well as the perspectives of others, to reflect, and to identify joys as well as the possibilities for changes they hope to make.

During the WVAE project, several programs set up writing groups to explore the value of writing in a supportive context, that encouraged students to bring their whole selves to their writing. They found these groups were extremely popular. One student at the York School said,

> *What I got most out of this writing experience was enlightenment on past experiences I had with violence, and how it has affected my ability to deal with today. It brought out my true inner feelings on how violence has affected me and the people I care about.*

Prompted by reading stories or poems that were meaningful to them, students wrote powerful pieces about their lives and their dreams. The writing sessions were opened and concluded with activities that encouraged the women to take care of themselves, build trust between them, and feel nurtured and respected.

Meditation and Movement

Meditation and movement can take many forms — for example, yoga or tai chi. Mindfulness practice can also help to ground students in the present, to unite all aspects of the self, and to help calm and relax. For many students it may be important to move out of "emergency" mode to a calmer place to be able to learn. Meditation and movement activities may support that process.

Genesis held a short yoga session at the start of classes to explore the value of this activity in helping students to be "present" and learn. Vermont Adult Learning tried out a course of mindfulness and meditation. The underpinning of their work was the understanding that "traumatic experience causes a disconnect between our minds and the wisdom of our bodies and a practice of mindfulness can help us to heal and reconnect."

Their instructor defined mindfulness as "a process in which we still our minds and practice non-judgement, patience, beginner's mind, non-striving, acceptance, and trust."

In a later session, the focus on mindfulness became more developed. The group looked at questions, such as: What things in our culture support women judging themselves? What is the influence of trauma on women judging themselves? They were introduced to the idea that we deserve a place of non-judgement, a place of not good or bad, just being.

Materials used to imagine new possibilities

> *In the practice of mindfulness we embrace the whole of our experience — the good, the negative, the difficult, the easy, the graceful, the uncomfortable — allowing it simply to be our experience. We choose to honor it all.* **(Tammy)**

These unfamiliar activities were often challenging for students. Art and journal materials were always available so that women could work with these if they were finding the activity too disturbing. When the course came to an end, the participants talked about the value of the sacred space that had been created and how it allowed them to imagine new possibilities in their lives.

Creative Arts

Creative arts help literacy students bring their whole selves to education and discover their ability to learn. The focus is usually less on learning an art form or craft for the sake of the skill and more on providing space for reflection, building confidence, and a sense of satisfaction.

Two of the programs that participated in the WVAE project offered groups that focused on visual arts: Vermont Adult Learning offered a collage-making course, and Genesis offered a quilt-making course. Students in the collage-making course reflected on why it was valuable as part of a welfare-to-work program:

> *It gave me a sense of self-confidence! I'm not artistic. I can't do anything...and I did that!* **(Jane)**
>
> *I had a good time. It taught me to be in a classroom situation again. I did get a job. It gave me the confidence that I can focus. It helped a lot. It definitely should be included.* **(Cherie)**

Jane also talked about how her collages revealed to her what she was interested in doing:

> *I didn't realize that workwise I was still so interested in kids. I've done childcare all these years and all of my pictures except one seem to focus on kids. I thought it was the last thing that I wanted to do. I've said that all along. I still say that, but no....* **(Jane)**

At Genesis, Gloria the quilting teacher, reflected on the shift in students' attitudes to their work in the quilting class:

> *Often people just disappear and you don't know what happened to them, but that wasn't the case in the quilting class. One woman had to leave the class because her family was moving. She was so sad; she didn't want to go. She was in the middle of appliquéing an owl on a pillow. She gave the owl to someone else to finish. Also, if someone was absent, another student would work on the absent student's project so she wouldn't fall behind and get discouraged. I didn't have anyone just disappear in that class. It wasn't just an English class. They had all worked on quilts together and that created quite a bond.* **(Gloria)**

Although the WVAE programs concentrated on visual arts, several program workers also talked about the value of music. As described earlier, many programs used pre-recorded music. But some programs also used singing as part of group work. At Vermont Adult Learning, staff spoke about how they used music:

> **Tammy:** *I sang opera for them one day.*
>
> **Katy:** *You just sing everything to people; instead of talking, you sing dramatically and with gusto. But then you can drop down to a quiet whisper, too. Highs, lows, everything. It has nothing to do with having a [good] voice.*
>
> **Jenny:** *And do you introduce this when there's chaos, or...?*
>
> **Tammy:** *Either when there's chaos, or when it just seems like nobody hears what I say anyway...or when the spirit moves me. I'm known to do that, in the morning.*
>
> **Katy:** *When you're just feeling operatic!*

This mention of music might encourage adult education programs to explore the value of making music. Singing integrates body, mind, emotion, and spirit and may have a powerful role in supporting learning. Creative arts of all sorts offer exciting possibilities for creating a "space" for reflection and invite students to bring their whole selves to learning.

Support and Empowerment

Several programs created support groups run jointly with a local counselor, which offered a site to help women explore issues of violence in their lives and in society. At the Community Education Project, they held a regular breakfast meeting where they had discussions and explored creative arts. At Even Start LINKS, they followed a curriculum to help women heal from violence in their lives. At Project Hope, they held a series of workshops to help women think about applying to college programs. Empowerment activities were also blended with creative arts or writing activities.

A student who participated in Project Hope's workshop series spoke of the value of the workshop:

> *I felt depressed before I came to this class.... I feel much better now.... I'll keep coming. This class makes me feel like I am a "somebody," not a nobody.*

Similarly, a student in the Even Start LINKS support group seemed to feel better about herself as a result of participating in the group.

> *It motivated me. It helped my self-esteem. When I left I felt excited again about doing stuff. Before I was in a depression and I didn't feel like doing anything. I was motivated by hearing that one of the women in the group was applying to college. It got me back on track again. It gave me a place to talk and clear my mind.*

Such an increase in self-esteem can make it possible for women to learn and make changes in their lives. When Janice Armstrong, the coordinator, interviewed another of the students about the value of the group, the student said,

> *What I wanted is to become stronger within. I knew I had a lot of strong points about the person that I am, but you always have that self-doubt. Am I really worthy? What is my purpose in life? What are my goals? What do I want? This is understanding of the feelings that you're going through and acknowledgement that it's all right to feel that way.*
>
> *I've always been a person that took little baby steps. The fear would always drive me back.... In the group it's mostly a knowledge that all these feelings are all right. It's normal.... Well I am weird, but the feelings are not weird. I think acknowledgement is really the main thing.*
>
> *If you keep [the sensitive areas] all bottled up, then you'll never truly be the person you were meant to be.*

Janet Smith, the teacher who worked with women in their homes and facilitated the group, reflected,

> *We have found that having a women's support group for learners has opened up time for literacy instruction during home visits because the women have less of a need to talk about their problems to the teachers.* **(Janet)**

Issues of Violence

When we think about how to address the impact of violence on learning, our first thought for new curriculum may be to focus directly on issues of violence and create curriculum that addresses particular aspects of violence or encourages participants to be activists taking on the issue in some way. However, we came to see this not as a first step, but as an approach a program might choose after other work had been carried out and the appropriate conditions have been created for opening up the issues safely.

If a program launches straight into curriculum on violence, students might find themselves focusing on an issue they didn't "sign up" to address and may not feel safe enough to recognize or confront. However, for some programs or groups, curriculum on violence and an activist stance may grow out of the culture of the program and the desires of the students and instructors. Women who have been active in their program and who have begun to address the issues in their lives may be eager to support other women to recognize the violence they are living with and make changes. When supports are in place for students and instructors, activities that take the learning out to others in the program or broader community can be powerful catalysts of change for the participants themselves and the people they connect with.

The Community Education Project produced a play that they have now performed many times within their community. Paul Hyry, the director at that time, wrote in a WVAE quarterly report,

> After some initial discussions and readings about domestic violence, the group decided to write a short play based on the poem "Tengo flores hoy." Originally conceived primarily as a classroom project, the learners' level of interest quickly brought things beyond the original scope. Once they had written the play, they liked it so much that they decided to present it to the public.
>
> The event continued to grow as the rehearsal and planning process went along, and ultimately became a full-scale community presentation involving a light meal, two plays (ours in Spanish, which included both drama and live music, and another in English by the Western Massachusetts Social Action Theater Group), and the presentation of information by the bilingual educator from Womanshelter/Compañeras, the local violence against women organization. Over 100 community members attended this event, including learners from all of the Bilingual/Native Language Literacy ABE classes in Holyoke, as well as from several English ABE and ESOL classes.

A wide range of innovative curriculums, which recognize the many issues in women's lives that can interfere with learning and that draw on the whole self to support learning, were explored by the participants of the Women, Violence, and Adult Education project. They are described more fully at the end of this chapter.

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Tools for Programs: Reflect and Take Action

Making Programming Choices

1. What are ways that your program can acknowledge the widespread presence of violence and the impact of violence on learning? How could these issues be raised and made visible so that experiences of violence are not seen as shameful events to be kept hidden? For example, can these issues be included at staff and student orientations? Consider what connections you may have (both inside and outside your program) that could help your program name the presence of violence.
2. List the ways you currently work to develop trust and safety in your class or program. Brainstorm with colleagues what you might do to increase safety for all in the program. Create a plan that outlines the first steps you will take, and when.
3. Look at your program's teaching space and the public space, and think about whether it could be made more beautiful, nurturing, and inspirational. If you think your space needs work, hold a visioning session with everyone who uses it. Encourage them to imagine what they would like the space to look like, sound like, and feel like, to support their learning and work. Perhaps they could create a collage, draw, model clay, or tell a story to help them imagine a new space.
4. How do programming decisions get made in your program? How can you open up a discussion about new programming ideas? Do you need to apply for funding to start a special group? Can you try out some new programming? Is there anyone within your program or in the community you have already connected with who might be able to lead a single session or new course in your program?
5. Introduce a budget discussion to open up thoughts about possibilities for buying materials to beautify the space or starting new programming. Can your program buy flowers or could this be added to the budget? Do you currently provide food or could nourishing food be added? If there is no money for such purchases, how else could they be obtained? Would a local florist make a regular donation? Are there any health food organizations in your area? Would an artists' co-op or supply store make a donation or volunteer time? Would a local tai chi or yoga center have volunteers? Could you convince a service club to contribute to the beauty and abundance in your space? Brainstorm possibilities to pay for a special instructor or supplies.

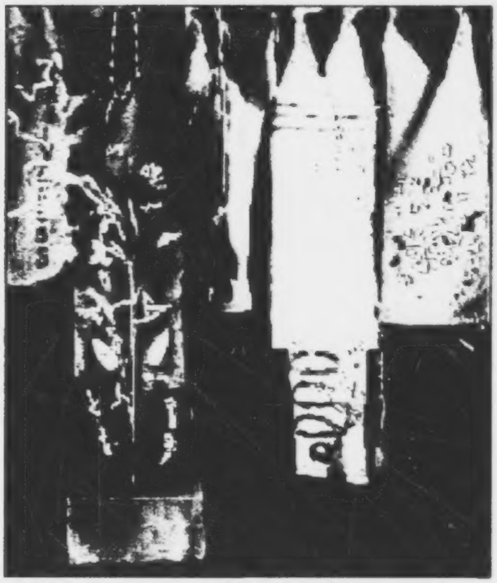
Prayer Flags[1]

This is a visual, hands-on activity that can be used to address an issue and to help us represent our weariness, stresses, frustrations, and hopes. It is something we can put up, add to, and look back on, or each person can take away a piece with them.

If hung outside, the prayer flag can be seen as sending thoughts and prayers for ourselves and to others in the world.

Materials

- a cord or a long piece of string onto which the flags can be tied
- 3 x 8 inch strips of cotton of different colors (or bigger rectangles), with slits cut into one end of the rectangle to tie the flag onto the line
- fabric glue
- a variety of materials for decorating, such as glitter, scraps of lace, an assortment of fabrics, feathers, sequins, other bought and found material



Prayer flags made by workshop participants

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[1] With thanks to Jo Sopko for the idea to use "prayer flags."

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Prayer Flags

Process

Talk about prayers/hopes (these can be personal or universal), and how prayer flags are used in various cultures. Give examples of what we can do — present possibilities in a context of hopes and dreams (e.g., May I find joy; May there be peace in the world).

Lead a quiet reflection and visualisation. Give participants time to create a visual prayer, using the materials supplied, to give to the group and to be carried to others in the world by the wind. Encourage participants to use nonverbal representations as well as words. People can talk about what they are doing as they wish.

End with everyone tying their flag on the line and voicing their hope if they want. Hang the flags on a line inside, which can later be taken outside.

About Prayer Flags

Prayer flags are used by Tibetan Buddhists (though they may pre-date Buddhism in the Himalayas) and hung from temple roofs, outside houses, and at pilgrimage sites, on auspicious occasions to send prayers with the wind out to the rest of the world. Teachers who were not comfortable using the image of prayer have called them "peace flags."

At DharmaShop.com they say, "The color of a prayer flag and the symbols printed on it create a prayer or offering that the wind distributes to the world each time it brushes against the flag. The Tibetan word for a horizontal prayer flag is Lung ta, which translates literally as 'wind horse.' Traditionally, prayer flags are used to promote peace, compassion, strength, and wisdom. They are also said to bring happiness and good health for all who hang the flags as well as for their families, loved ones, neighbors, nearby strangers, and enemies. The prayers of a flag become a permanent part of the universe as the images fade from wind and sun. Just as life moves on and is replaced by new life, Tibetans renew their hopes for the world by continually mounting new flags alongside of the old. This act symbolizes a welcoming of life's changes and an acknowledgment that all beings are part of a greater, on-going circle of life."

Ellen Shaw and Leslie Ridgway making prayer flags

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Creating Collages

Creating collages can be a relaxing, meditative process and a powerful way to express thoughts and feelings. As with many art forms, collage-making can lead to insights that may be difficult to access when only our thinking selves are engaged.

You can explore an infinite number of topics when collaging. We used collaging (with teachers and students) for several broad purposes:

1. To explore our understanding of violence
2. To reflect on ourselves and what we have learned in relation to this work
3. To express dreams, feelings, and where we are at in the moment
4. To build a sense of group by creating something beautiful and meaningful together

Preparing materials

One of the most important steps for collage making is the preparation. Find a variety of materials that can be glued onto paper, such as:

- magazines
- all kinds of paper (scraps of gift wrap, tissue paper, colored photocopy paper, construction paper)
- fabric of different colors and textures (scraps of lace, velvet, etc.)
- ribbons
- odds and ends, such as buttons, twigs, grasses, seaweed, glitter, pipe cleaners, popsicle sticks

Choose materials according to the purpose of the collage. For instance decide whether or not to use magazines (with words and pictures) or if you want participants to visualize more abstractly with colors and textures only.

You will also need:

- several pairs of scissors
- glue sticks, Elmer's glue, or fabric glue according to materials you use
- cut sheets or squares of paper for each individual to glue the materials onto

Creating Collages

Creating a relaxed and focused environment

Set a comfortable tone. Find what works for the group: perhaps they would like to listen to music, perhaps they would like to talk with one another as they work, or maybe they prefer silence.

Depending on the subject, it may make sense to work individually, in pairs, or in small groups. Encourage them to work in a way that is comfortable for them, for example, standing or sitting, finding a quiet spot or sitting with a group. Ask if there is anything else you could do to create a relaxed space for the group.

Help the group focus on the question at hand. Below is a list of questions that we explored through collage. You may choose one of these questions for exploration or another one of your own. It may be useful to guide participants through a short visualization exercise to help them focus on the question and become more aware of what they are thinking and feeling. For example, when we as trainers first came together as a group, we introduced ourselves to one another through a collage activity in which we explored what each of us brought to this work and what each of us hoped to gain from our involvement in the project. We were asked to take a moment, close our eyes, breathe, and think about the gifts we were bringing to the work. Next we were asked to imagine ourselves once the project was completed and consider what we hoped we would have experienced and learned.

Questions to explore

Consider exploring one of the following questions, or another one important to the group:

- What are your assumptions about violence?
- How do you understand different types of violence, including private and public violence, workplace violence, institutional violence?
  (Note: This question may work best in small groups or pairs with each assigned to explore one of these aspects of violence. You may want to include a variety of materials specifically about violence such as those in Resources 171.)
- What do you bring to this work? How do you hope to benefit from engaging in this work? What do you hope to gain?
- Chart your journey: What have you learned? What has supported your learning? What has made it difficult? What are your next steps?
- How are you feeling now?

Creating Collages

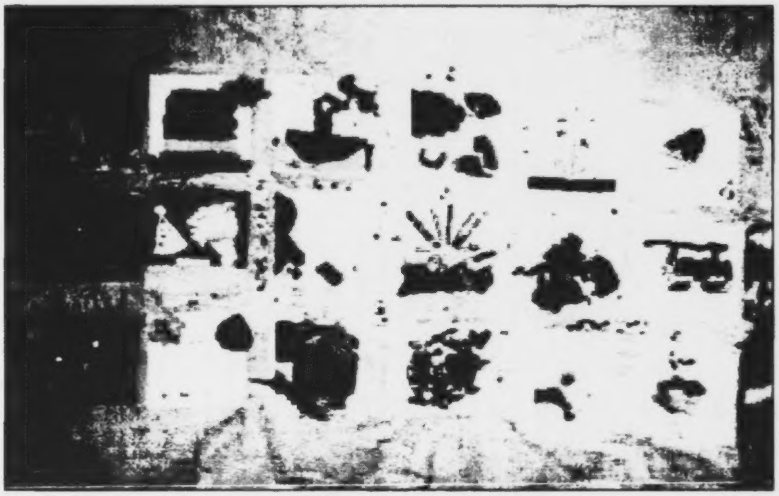
Making collages

Explain to the group that they can choose from the wide variety of materials in front of them to create a collage in response to the question that they are exploring. The process is quite simple involving selecting materials that "speak" to the person and arranging and gluing the materials onto the paper.

Reflecting and sharing

Once the collages are completed, ask each person or group to share what they have created and the insights they have gained in response to the question at hand.

You may decide to create a paper quilt of the collage squares by gluing each of th collages onto a large piece of newsprint. You could hang the collage quilt in the classroom or if the group is comfortable with it, display it in a public space in the program.



Paper collage quilt focusing on healing

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Taking Up the Impact of Violence in Literacy

Taking up the impact of violence

- **Does NOT mean** we have to focus the curriculum directly on violence, though you may choose to if

    students are interested in looking at issues of violence, and

    the supports for students and instructors are in place.

- **Does NOT mean** we have to say this is the place for students to talk in detail about the violence they have experienced, though you may choose to invite these stories if

    it is appropriate for this particular group,

    it is a safe setting, and

    the supports for students and instructors are in place.

- **DOES mean** we have to create appropriate conditions for learning. These include

    acknowledging that many people experience violence and that violence can affect learning;[1]

    working together to create safety and trust;

    creating a comfortable place to nurture the whole self — e.g., music, moments of silence, flowers, snacks, easy chair/s, beautiful pictures, inspirational quotes; and

    using curriculum that engages and nurtures the whole person — body, mind, emotions, and spirit.

---

[1] Although some students may escape from the violence they experience into their studies and excel in school, many more will have difficulties with learning.

Examples from Programs

In this section of Chapter 3 each of the six programs describe how they explored working with students to support learning and address the impact of violence. You will read week-by-week descriptions of how groups were begun and facilitated; ways in which activities encouraged bringing the whole self to teaching and learning and the positive outcomes for teachers and students; teacher reflection; and student writing.

Program Groups

Getting Ready to Work, Vermont Adult Learning

Katy Chaffee and Tammy Stockman

The Women's Support Group for Well-Being

After attending the first training institute and learning about Jenny's "Women's Success course," I came back to Vermont excited about the design and wanting to find some way of implementing a similar program.

We took a day in September to retreat from the office and have a planning session. Two out of our three regular staff were able to attend. Also invited were a therapist familiar with the population we serve as well as with issues of trauma and Fawn Woods, from the Getting Ready to Work site in Brattleboro. We borrowed a house on the lake and brought plenty of good food.

The goal for the day was to name our group and develop a curriculum plan for the upcoming months. Our conversation centered on healing rather than trauma. Everyone agreed that we did not want either the group name or the activities to focus on the negative. Through the dialogue we decided that our central theme would be well-being. Thus, our group became "The Women's Support Group for Well-Being." Our focus would be on health and well-being: what it is, where it comes from, how we maintain it.

We also decided to hire other people to teach/facilitate the sessions. We, as staff, would attend and participate and view this as professional development. We would, however, remain involved in planning and evaluating each of the classes.

Meditation and Movement

Katy contacted Sydney Crystal, who had studied Mindfulness and Stress Reduction at the University of Massachussetts Medical Center, to see if Sydney would be interested in coming to work with us a few hours each week for eight weeks. Sydney was pleased to accept.

Each week, the session focused on different themes, such as mindfulness, acceptance, living in the moment, listening, self-trust, and creating space for yourself.

Session 1

Planned activities:
Design ground rules, talk about well-being, and decorate journals.

What happened:
The five women who attended were angry about having to talk about ground rules. "We don't want any stinking rules. We have too many everywhere we go." The group's rebellious behavior felt violent to the staff and we were concerned about members being rude to one another. After 90 minutes of chaos, someone suggested that we rename the ground rules Common Courtesies, and everyone agreed to that.

The most enjoyable part of this session was decorating our journals. Participants were thrilled to have both the supplies and the time to work on a craft project.

Session 2

Planned activities:
Visit the Montshire Museum of Science to view an exhibit of photographs by Ansel Adams.

What happened:
We met at the center and talked about Ansel Adams, his work and its impact, and about art as an expression of inner "spiritual" feelings. Once the group arrived at the museum, the participants talked a lot and moved through the exhibit very quickly.

Concerns:
Staff worried that the group was not ready to begin the mindfulness practices. We e-mailed Sydney to keep her informed about the group dynamics and possible difficulties.

Session 3

This week our mindfulness practice began. Sydney joined the group for the first time. We set the stage by removing all of the tables from our large meeting room and putting the chairs in a circle. Fresh flowers and a scented candle were placed on the floor at the center of the circle. We planned to make these preparations each week before class.

Planned activities:
Define mindfulness and its relationship to healing from trauma. Talk about how trauma causes a disconnect between our minds and the wisdom of our bodies. Practice some breathing techniques, yoga stretching, short meditation.

What happened:
A lot of giddiness, laughing, making faces, and a certain amount of refusal to try some of the activities. We discussed how to increase listening skills and to respect

other people's boundaries. A few of our participants began to disclose how they had not been listened to in their lives.

Concerns:
We worried about how comfortable participants would be with these new and apparently strange ideas. We decided to keep art and journal supplies out on the table in the next room so that group members could choose not to participate in an activity, but still have something to do.

Session 4

Planned activities:
Think about how we feel when we are most relaxed. Talk about listening as part of being mindful. What makes listening hard? Question how trauma affects our ability to be still, listen, or to connect with ourselves and others. Brainstorm what helps us stay in listening mode.

Review the definition of mindfulness. Learn some basic yoga and guided meditation.

What happened:
Still some silliness and negative reactions to the guided meditation, but overall we witnessed a more willing attitude.

Concerns:
Were we moving along too fast? Every time the door to the center opened everyone froze and we found it extremely difficult to bring the group back on track.

Session 5

Planned activities:
Check in with everybody about how they are feeling and ask them to mention any mindful moments from the past week. Talk about feelings that arise when we still ourselves, about how we can make a safe space for others and ourselves, and become more comfortable with these feelings.

This was the beginning of what we came to call the circle questions. Each session would begin with Sydney posing a question to a person sitting next to her, who would then ask the next person, and so on, around the circle. This first question was, "What nourishes you?"

Talk about the things in our culture that encourage women to judge themselves. What is the influence of trauma on women judging themselves? Introduce the revolutionary idea that we deserve a place of non-judgement, a place of not good or bad, just being. In the practice of mindfulness we embrace the whole of our experience, the good, the negative, the difficult, the easy, the graceful, the uncomfortable, allowing all parts of ourselves to simply be.

Guided meditation of not more than ten minutes.

What happened:
A turning point: we locked the door. A note was taped to the door instructing any group member who arrived late to knock to be let in; anyone else would have

to come back later. The idea of being locked in was a little unsettling for people at first, but the initial reaction was short-lived. Participants began to truly own the space and time.

This is when our group became a retreat. People were able to take chances and show a new level of trust. Participants began to bring in things to share: framed poems to hang on the kitchen walls, photographs of family members, inspiring thoughts from the Internet, finished craft projects, and novels, to name a few. They also began to show signs of accepting Sydney, our facilitator, as "one of us."

When the door was locked and the phones turned off and the fear of being interrupted eliminated, when the collective act of self-care was given top priority and the rest of the world sent a clear message that this was our space and time, that was when we felt a sense of well-being. And that was when trust was built.

Session 6

Planned activities:
Circle question: What is your heart's desire?
Practice guided meditation and mild yoga stretching.

Talk about how trauma affects people's ability to trust themselves, their reactions, and their assessment of a situation. Look at mindfulness as a way of developing a basic trust in ourselves, as a way of looking to the inner wisdom of our body, heart, and mind to know what is right for us now.

Sydney planned to ask the following questions:

> How do you feel when you have a sense that things are not right/O.K. for you?
>
> How do you know when you can "sit" with a particular feeling or thought and when you need to leave things alone?

What happened:
Participants became quiet and uncomfortable when Sydney talked openly about trauma. One participant said that she didn't want to think about that "stuff." There were not many responses to her questions.

Session 7

Planned activities:
Circle question: What is something you value about yourself?

Revisit the theme of self-trust. How does trusting ourselves relate to trusting others? What have you noticed about self-trust? Where have you met self-trust in the past week? Feel where we hold tension in our bodies. Mindful eating of fruit. Meditate.

What happened:
It was difficult for people to take the mindful eating of fruit seriously but they tried. One participant who had been doing a lot of watching up to this point got down on the floor and practiced the body scan for the first time.

Session 8

Planned activities:
Briefly discuss the idea of using meditation/yoga to give ourselves space to be in the present, to be responding versus reacting to life. Discuss the difference between responding and reacting. Attempt a 10 minute meditation, our longest thus far.

Circle question: How do you make space for yourself? Also think about how we give space to each other.

Concerns:
No one is prepared to give up our weekly retreat. Next week will be our last session of the mindfulness practices. Participants are voicing their concerns over losing this sacred space and how that is going to affect them and their emotional stability.

Session 9

Planned activities:
We will begin this session with a sitting period of 15 minutes. We will review what we have discussed during our time together, practice some yoga/balancing poses, and end with self-massage.

Think about and share one thing we will try to do for ourselves every day to make space for us, to help us just be in the moment.

What happened:
Sydney brought each of us a different colored rose that she presented at the end of the session. There were a lot of hugs and a few tears. Sydney had been accepted totally by our group. She had prove herself to be reliable and patient, as well as very human. No one wanted the weekly retreat to come to an end.

The Christmas Celebration

As the last mindfulness session came to a close, our Christmas Celebration began. There was an open invitation to all Getting Ready to Work participants in our area to join us for this celebration, which the mindfulness group hosted.

Reflections

On the day of our last meeting together as a group, we took a few minutes to reflect on the experience:

> *No one can invade here no matter what. This is a space apart from the rest of your life.* **(Katrina)**

> *The most important thing I learned was to make space for myself. When I got married I gave up the space I had for myself. I spent eight full hours hoeing it out. I can't believe how much room I made. I bought some lace curtains at the second hand store. I washed the curtains. I've taken up three quarters of that room again. My next thing is to bring in plants from the living room. Then I want to lay down some carpet and turn it into my own space.* **(Vicky)**

> *I liked non-judgment. I appreciated the safety of this group, that I could try things. In other groups, I have felt that I'm not as good as everybody else in the room. Here I'm not worried about not being able to do what other people can do. I liked the circle questions.* **(Christine)**

> *What's special about the groups here is that nobody's judgmental of anybody else. It's a warm environment. I love crowds but if I feel judged, I freeze up. It's awesome here!* **(Katrina)**

> *Relaxed state? Never!! I have five boys. This here is my physical private space. It is peaceful and relaxing. If I don't come here, I am out of control. After I leave here, I feel better because I've done something for myself.*
>
> *I like the go-around and asking questions. It made you think — about your heart's desire, what you value, what nourishes you.* **(Aria)**

Writing

Katy Chaffee began meeting with Ariel Brewster, an 18-year-old high school senior, to discuss the possibility of Ariel facilitating a writing group in our program. Ariel had discovered a passion for creative writing and had recently learned creative techniques for getting started. Because of this unique expertise and a young but thoughtful and mature presence, they decided to experiment with a group, to develop self-expression skills.

Ariel's high school, Hanover High, allowed her to combine her academic learning with a hands-on project. Ariel worked with a Dartmouth College professor, meeting with her once a week to discuss assigned readings about women and poverty. Ariel later commented that her real experiences with the women in the group brought the material to life for her. When she later evaluated her experience with the group, she said,

> *Leaving upscale Hanover (New Hampshire) to come to White River Junction was like entering a different world of real people and problems compared to self-absorbed students worrying about their calculus test or what to wear to the prom. It's a close distance actually, but different worlds of experience. People in the group shared honestly about their lives. I learned that you can learn from everybody — especially people from different backgrounds.* **(Ariel)**

Katy and Ariel began corresponding by e-mail about the course outline and the writing topics. They drafted an outline based on the needs and interests of the women in our program.

Thanks to our connections from the *International Conference on Women and Literacy*, Atlanta, January, 2001, we met Deborah Morgan and ordered her curriculum, *Writing Out Loud*,[1] which served as a valuable resource.

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[1] Morgan, Deborah. *Writing Out Loud*. Grass Roots Press, P.O. Box 52192, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada T6G 2T5. Toll Free: 1-888-303-3213. http://www.literacyservices.com/TRead.htm, and her new *Writing Out Loud*: http://www.literacyservices.com/newprod.htm

A new group

Our bright, young facilitator, Ariel, was introduced to the group. The group identifies Hanover and Hanover High School as a rich, snobby community. There is certainly a prejudice against the town within the group. Ariel agreed with them about some of the isms of Hanover; however, she also stressed what a good education she has received and how valuable that is.

The group was mesmerized by her, seeking the sunniness of her youth and success. They were kind and playful with her, protective, anxious to hear about her life. Some of the readings that we did in the class were written by her, revealing glimpses of her life.

Whenever we have a new group that forms, we establish ground rules. How do we want to be together as a group? Ariel was the only new person in the group; the others had participated in many groups together. We decided that since we were only five, we would just wing it. If problems arose, then we would feel comfortable enough to address them.

The first week we decorated our journals — magazines, fabric, sparkles, feathers, and glue sticks were available to do the job. The group had a lively, fun time, a chance to break the ice, talk informally, and ask Ariel lots of questions.

Each week every participant was given a gift. The first week, women were given a blank journal and a gel pen. Other gifts included bath salts, incense, and fancy pens. It was touching how thrilled the participants were to receive these gifts. The cost of any of these gifts was no more than three dollars, but for women living on welfare, three dollars is not money you spend on gifts for yourself, especially not on a weekly basis. The purpose of the gifts was to pamper the learners and make them feel special.

What to write about

One of the exercises that Ariel wanted to do was to write about a bad experience. Katy nixed the idea. Talk about bad experiences! The lives of the women we work with are filled with bad experiences. In the short time our group had been meeting, one woman had lost custody of her nine-year-old son to SRS (Social and Rehabilitation Services); a second woman had been involved in a court case to prosecute the "friend" of the family who had sexually molested her two young boys; another woman who had been diagnosed as having bipolar disorder struggled daily with her mental health and had to constantly adjust her activities to try to have a life for herself; and the fourth member of the group struggled with her dwindling household income and the trying days of a teenage daughter.

Another writing topic was school lunches. I'm sure that when Katy and Ariel chose this topic, they hadn't anticipated any problems, but this subject also posed some difficulties. Carla said that just thinking about school lunches was too painful to her; the kids used to make fun of her and nothing about high school was a good memory. Anna wrote that school lunches meant getting stoned behind the school and then coming back for the rest of the day in a haze. Dianne was transported back to the smiling faces of the three cooks at the school, people she hadn't thought of in many years. The group took some time to talk about the feelings that had surfaced.

A weekly homework assignment was to have a gratitude journal. Each night before going to bed we were supposed to make a list of five things that we were grateful for. One member of the group said that she was in such bad shape at first that all she was able to write was that she was thankful for her bed and her bedroom's four walls, but each week it became easier for her to appreciate things and not just focus on the negative. The gratitude journal became a way for some participants to rearrange their focus, even if just for a short time.

One exercise that the group enjoyed was when we made acronyms out of our names. It was a quick, easy way for people to let the others in the group get more acquainted with them. *N* was for "needs a lot of sleep", *E* was for "energetic", *D* was for "dancing to the oldies"...you get the idea!

Another exercise that we did was continuous writing for five minutes. If you got stuck, you just wrote "I am stuck, I am stuck," until the words began to flow. Another week we listed the characteristics of a special friend.

Reading

As part of every class Ariel brought in pieces of writing by other authors, including pieces that she had written. We took turns reading aloud, always having the option to pass if we did not feel comfortable. We took turns by each reading a paragraph and found that if at the end of a paragraph the reader wanted to keep going, she would.

Both facilitators were surprised at the high level of reading skills. Participants rarely had to stop to ask about the pronunciation or the meaning of what they were reading.

I had known one of the participants for about eight years and at times had questioned if she had severe learning disabilities. I now know that she is chronically depressed and has all the signs of post-traumatic stress. Her poor eyesight is due to being hit so many times in the head as a child. She presents herself so poorly that I made the assumption that she wouldn't be able to read well. Some part of her is masked as a result of depression and trauma. It was wonderful to see her in a new light. She really liked reading aloud to the group, although she struggled with the writing because she felt that everything was bad in her life and she had nothing to write.

Depression factored into the lives of all the participants, except for our young facilitator's, and had an impact on their learning and attendance. After a particularly trying session in court, one participant "hid" in her apartment for two weeks, unable to function.

Collage

At an afternoon staff retreat, we decided the next adventure for the Well-Being Group would be artistic. After brainstorming and rating a list of possible community resources, we went to the phones to research and develop concrete options. The investigation led to the discovery of Joan Burch, a collagist.

Meet the artist

Joan Burch, a former English teacher and fundraiser, was currently working as an artist-in-residence at Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center. We met to discuss her willingness to work in a new context with a different population, and we both became excited about the possibility.

Joan had become involved in collage as a result of having breast cancer. "Using collage allowed me to get at some feelings I couldn't express verbally." The experience eventually led her to leave her work and to pursue her art.

We discussed the need to ensure a safe and protected space to create art, especially self-exploratory and healing art. Joan is convinced of the healing power of art for her own life and for others.

(See the Resources section page 152 for a step-by-step description of the collage process.)

By the end of eight weeks together, ten participants had created over 20 collages that were taped to our meeting room walls. No one in the group had had any previous artistic training, and there was genuine surprise among us as, week after week, the display grew in size, beauty, and variety. A human resources consultant assisting with our job search class inquired about the artist. She revealed that she worked professionally as a photographic artist and complimented us on the work. The collage group began to talk about showing off what we had accomplished. The group was enthusiastic about displaying their collages at the state-wide Getting Ready to Work conference.

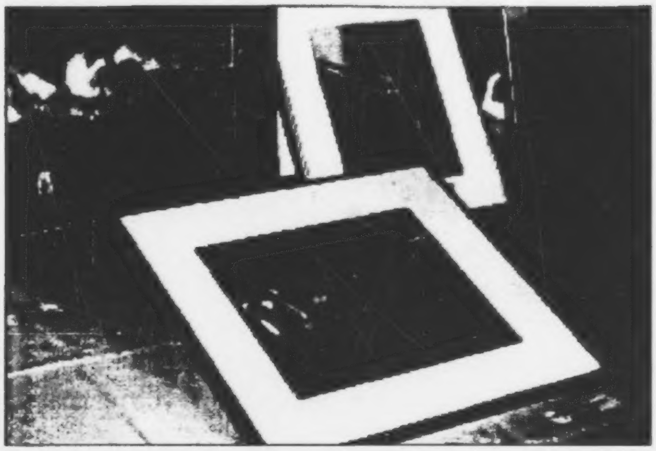
The idea to frame the finished products was an inspired intuition, supported by grant funding. The average cost per frame was 20 dollars. The announcement that we would frame one piece per participant and allow them the option to frame more at their own expense received overwhelming applause.

> *I don't have anything nicely framed in my house. And I am the artist!*
>
> *I liked what I made. I was already satisfied. But this gives me a sense of completion and accomplishment that I couldn't have imagined.*
>
> *This is going up on my bedroom wall. This is for me.*

Participants selected their favorite piece for framing and Joan Burch met with each woman individually to assist with measurements and color choices. Finally, we assembled them, step by careful step. As each was completed, we hung them on the wall and admired the work with amazement. A totally awesome sight! We ate lunch together to celebrate and reflected on the collage process and what we had learned from it. The framed collages were beautiful!

The participants were extremely pleased with the results:

> *I'm amazed that mine came out so good. I'm really pleased. My last two pictures just came out really good. And I don't know, it just really made me feel good, girls!* **(Tracy)**
>
> *I was shocked! They are beautiful. You could never paint it that way, you could never draw it that way. It's beautiful. It is beautiful art.* **(Cherie)**



Collage display at the state conference

Finding images of real people
We had a large and varied collection of magazines for selecting images.

Over the weeks, a conversation developed about images and how they reflect commercialism as opposed to the diversity, messiness, and richness of "real life." Participants talked excitedly about being drawn to images — collecting them at home, at the laundromat, the doctor's office. One person said, "It has changed the way I see images forever."

Issues of gender and culture raised by the available images
On the days that we talked while working, collage opened the door to deeply personal discussions about issues of race and gender within a relaxed, nonthreatening context. For example, some of our participants have Native American heritage and noticed that images of Native Americans were scarce. Discussions ensued about prejudice and racial stereotypes in families and in communities, about civil unions, about incidences of insult and disrespect, etc.

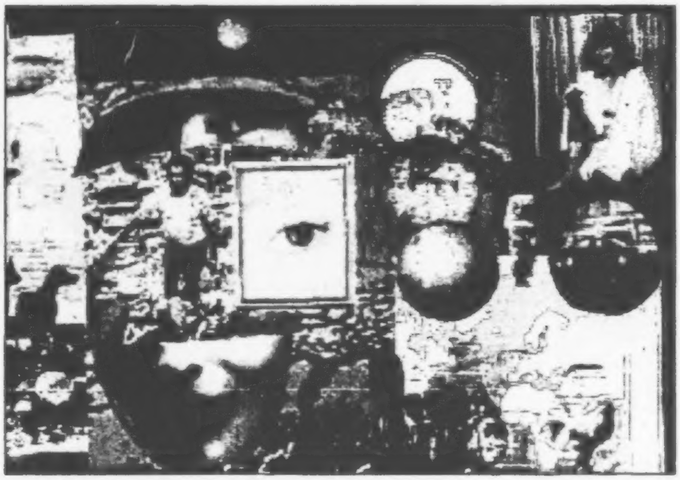
Week after week, as we looked through magazines, we were barraged by presentations of sexualized, beautiful young women's bodies. It was impossible to avoid talking about the meaning for us as women, for our children, for healthy communities, for the future.

> *A man can look like anything. He can be heavy, thin. He can be old, he can be young.* **(Cherie)**
>
> *It was hard to find even three pictures of males showing concern or caring.* **(Jane)**
>
> *In the process of making collages, we've taken the images handed to us by commercialism and reshaped them with a new message.* **(Katy)**
>
> *You never look at a magazine the same way again.* **(Joan)**

How the collage process relates to the welfare-to-work agenda

There is an expectation that welfare-to-work training should provide goal-oriented, job-related programming. This Well-Being Support Group provided a weekly personal space for valuing each other and ourselves for asking questions and for exploring who we are and what we are meant to do in this world. The format helped clarify career directions for some or an appreciation of personal strengths — but for others the collage process offered more questions than answers.

> *It's unusual to include collage in a Getting Ready to Work program. I would like your opinion on whether you think being a part of this program is valuable. I get questions from other people about that.* **(Katy)**
>
> *When I finished my first collages and stood back and looked at them, I was surprised. They showed me feelings I didn't know were there. I still use collage in this personal, revealing way.* **(Joan)**
>
> *I know that the collage I did about change is very important to me. Because I'm very angry at the world that we live in and the conditions that there are. It [the collage] gave me a place to put it. It also gave me a place to put it where it should be. It got it out of me. Because I couldn't put it into words, but I could put it all on the collage.* **(Aimee)**
>
> *Feelings came out as I did my first collage. As I did my other ones, there were more questions than answers. Someone asked me, "Why do you keep doing these beautiful women?" I don't really know why. I call them my goddesses.* **(Dede)**



"There Will be Change"
by Aimee Ferland

Even Start LINKS

Janice Armstrong and Janet Smith

Women's Support and Empowerment Group

Even Start LINKS worked with the local Abused Women's Advocacy Project (AWAP) to set up a women's group for the mothers participating in the program. We called it an Empowerment Group. At one point we thought of saying it was for women who had suffered abuse, but we decided to address it in a more positive way. We decided to focus on empowerment and doing more for ourselves. It worked because five of our mothers, one-third of our program, went to the first meeting. The average attendance was three or four, which was better than for other programs.

One problem is that isolation breeds isolation, and because the women are isolated, it can be very hard for them to be with groups of people. The challenge is to break that isolation or make being together easier, more pleasant, less stressful. We circulated fliers that announced the group throughout the surrounding communities and to our learners and clients. The group was available to any woman in the surrounding area who wished to register. We initially met for ten weeks and then continued for an additional five because the women expressed an interest in continuing the group until the end of the school year.

The group size varied from twelve to only two at our final group session. The women ranged in age from mid-twenties to mid-sixties with the majority of the women in their late thirties to early forties. The group sessions always began with a check-in, with each member sharing their feelings on one of the following questions: What do you get out of coming to group? What do you want from the group today? How are you feeling? What nice thing did you do for yourself this week? What is going on in your life now?

This was followed by an exercise/education activity from the book *Trauma, Recovery and Empowerment*, by Maxine Harris.[1] We did the activities sequentially and adapted them to the group. The groups always ended on a positive note with a checkout activity. We did one called Empowerment Beads. We had purchased and also received donations of different beads that we kept in a bowl. During the last 10 minutes of group each woman would take two beads from the bowl. She would give one to any other group member and tell her why she deserved to have the empowerment bead. She would then give a bead to herself and tell the group why she deserved an empowerment bead. It was always optional for the women to speak in the group. They could pass at any time if they wanted to. The facilitators were active members of the group as well as the leaders. This meant that we participated in check-in, in answering questions from the guide activities, and in checkout.

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[1] Harris, Maxine. *Trauma, Recovery and Empowerment: A Clinician's Guide for Working with Women in Groups.* New York: Free Press, 1998.

Women from the support group work at the computer

Four of the women in the group were learners from Even Start LINKS. I chose to interview and report on one of those women who I will refer to as Joan.

Joan enrolled in Even Start LINKS in November of 2000 and during the first several months of our home visits she would become very emotional and cry. She has two sons, ages three and six, who were in Head Start and kindergarten. Her older son was having behavioral problems at school and she had a controlling partner. Her goals were to learn to use the computer, to be able to support her children's education, to improve her self-esteem, and to earn the respect of others.

When I showed Joan the flyer describing the group she was very excited about participating. During the first two sessions she did not speak, she only introduced herself, and she cried many times throughout the sessions. During the third session she began to feel more comfortable, and by the fourth session she participated fully in all of the activities and discussions. She was one of the women who participated in the additional five weeks of the group.

I also saw changes in her at-home visits during this time. She cried less, and was able to focus more on the educational activities, both the computer activities and the parenting activities. She enrolled in a computer class at the learning center in May. She was working with her son's classroom teachers to improve his behavior in school and with her husband to maintain a consistent disciplinary front in the home. She progressed from feeling bullied by the teachers and not responding to them even when she didn't agree with them, to taking the initiative to schedule meetings when she had a concern and going in and presenting her concerns with documentation, in an assertive manner. She would suggest materials on parenting that she had read and found helpful to her husband and was able to get him to actively participate in these meetings at the school. Joan also played a very active role in organizing an end of the year family trip for all of the Even Start LINKS families, along with two other parents.

About a month after the group had ended, I sat down with Joan and asked her a few questions.

> **What interested you in joining the group and what did you expect?**
> *I wanted someone to talk to. I wanted to find support and encouragement and to boost my self-esteem.*
>
> **What did you like about participating in the group?**
> *It's nice to go to a place where a woman can talk and be honest with herself and know it's not going to come back when you get home.*

Confidentiality was very important to her and she especially liked the facilitator's policy of not greeting group members when she sees them in the community unless the woman speaks first. She explained to the group that she does this because this is such a small community and many people know her as the director of AWAP and she doesn't want the woman's partner, family, or friends to question her about how she knows this woman.

Joan also described the group as "her own space."

> *Childcare was provided, there was no stress, no criticizing, and no judging. You could speak up if you wanted or just listen. It was a good resource to get information or help with what you wanted. Each session had a topic; everyone had a chance to check in at the beginning. It wasn't like a class where we had to get to the lesson. Time was flexible, you had the chance to clear your mind first, and then move on.* **(Joan)**

When I asked what had helped her and how, she said being able to talk things out, being able to get some good laughs, hearing that others go through the same stuff. She said that she always felt good about herself when she left.

> *No one said or acted like they didn't want to hear what you said.... It was relaxing but sometimes I was exhausted when I left.* **(Joan)**

Reflections

Janice, the coordinator, later spoke about how the group affected the program:

> *They were talking, planning together. They felt a part of the planning. This is what we really wanted to see happen, but it hasn't happened until this year and I see the WVAE project playing an important part of that.*
>
> *We had tried so many different ways to bring these women together and they just hadn't worked; but this clicked. They got together and planned an end-of-the-year trip to Bangor for their nine families. One of the fathers drives a school bus. We managed to get him and the school bus to go to Bangor. They did all the planning.*

> *[So why did it click?] Because of this women's empowerment group. They were meeting together every Wednesday for an hour, and then afterwards Janet would stick around and they started talking about what they could do together. They were getting to know each other. Before they were very resistant to that. They would say, "Well, those people are not my kind of people," or "I don't go out of my house," "I am shy, I don't want to meet people." Once they came together sharing, they realized they had a lot in common and that they could give each other a lot of support.* **(Janice)**

The teacher, Janet, said,

> *We have found that having a women's support group for learners has opened up time for literacy instruction during home visits because the women have less of a need to talk about their problems to the teachers.* **(Janet)**

York School, York Correctional Institution

Kim McCaughey and Leslie Ridgway

At the York School the project participants collaborated with colleagues to introduce a wide range of new programming. This included:

Hope, Health, and Healing

A graduate student volunteered to conduct 10 different health-related workshops, which focused on health issues associated with violence. Topics included how violence affects health, how to communicate health concerns, cervical cancer, HIV/AIDS, breast cancer, how nutrition affects health, and transitional health skills.

Meditation

Jan Willis and Marlies Bosch first presented a one-day workshop on meditation to a group of 15 students. They then returned to present a series of workshops described in their upcoming book *Transforming Prejudice.*[1] The focus of the workshops was to present practical exercises that explore the obstacles that prevent us from respecting and loving others as well as ourselves. Many of the workshop visualization practices delved into why many suffer from low self-esteem. The workshops utilized writing exercises, physical exercises, and meditation and visualization. The main goal was to have the women become aware of the positive and negative qualities human beings' possess, and to transform negative ones into positive qualities of confidence, capability, kindness, and strength.

Self-Esteem Group

A 10 week self-esteem group was run for 25 students after school by two teachers (a registered nurse and a special education teacher) who volunteered their time to design their own curriculum focusing on the needs of incarcerated women.

Don't Give It Away

A workshop for teens was designed and run by a school social worker based on Vanzant's book *Don't Give It Away.*[2]

Classroom Lessons

Lesson plans for individual classes were developed based on a general awareness of violence. Topics included violence in public space, domestic violence, childhood abuse, state violence, and workplace violence. Lessons were developed to be presented in multimedia format.

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[1] See http://www.southernscribe.com/zine/authors/Willis_2.htm for a description and interview with Jan Willis.

[2] Vanzant, Iyanla. *Don't Give It Away: A Workbook Of Self-Awareness And Self-Affirmations For Young Women.* New York: Fireside, 1999.

Barriers to Success, Freshmen Experience

The administration of York CI School coordinated and organized a program to help students beginning with college. During the five classes, which were taught by a professor from Three Rivers Community Technical College, students learned about stress reduction and general college information.

Women's Support and Writing Group

"Struggles," a creative writing/support group was born when two staff members, Leslie and Dale, decided to merge the healing qualities of creative writing with a support group to address the impact of violence on learners. Leslie is the school social worker and one of the members of the Women, Violence, and Adult Education project team, and Dale is the creative writing consultant. We were armed with little more than the belief that a supportive writing group would allow the women a safe place to express themselves and that this would have a positive impact on their lives and their learning.

Initially we met for eight weekly sessions, but because the women expressed an interest in the group continuing, we extended the group for another eight weeks. This proved to be too long and in the final evaluation the women agreed that 12 weeks would be optimal. We accepted 15 women into the first group. This worked out very well as five women dropped out by the third week, leaving us with ten consistent participants.

We started the group with exercises designed to build group cohesiveness and encouraged the group to establish their own rules. One of the women recorded the rules on a large piece of paper and this was posted at each group meeting. Everyone was given a composition book and we provided fabric, lace, colored paper, and ribbon for the women to decorate and personalize the journal that they would use to write in.

Initially the group leaders suggested writing prompts such as "What was the first time you remember violence affecting your life?" and "How has violence affected your education?" This did not work. Although group participants were aware that the group was a result of the Women, Violence, and Adult Education grant and that healing from the violence in their lives was one of the stated purposes of the group, these questions were far too threatening for the women to write about.

What did work was reading a poem or a selected bit of prose and then using a line from the reading to prompt writing. Participants also had the option to use another line from the reading or not to use a prompt at all, but write about something else. The women used lines from the readings nearly every time. This proved to be very successful. Each person was encouraged to share her writing with the group, but they were always allowed to pass. No criticism was allowed, only positive feedback. In time, as group cohesiveness developed, the women would occasionally ask the group for time to discuss a personal issue aside from, or related to, the writing process. The group was very receptive to these discussions as there are few safe places where women can discuss personal issues in the prison and access to mental health services is limited.

Writing circle at York School

As a closing activity the first group decided to share a wish or a blessing for the person seated beside them for the upcoming week; for example, "I wish you strength to meet the challenges of the coming week." We found this closing ritual to be very powerful for building group cohesiveness. Members would often change seats from week to week to be next to different people each time.

This group earned a very positive reputation among the students, and over the course of the 16 weeks many other students expressed an interest in joining. In an effort to have a maximum number of students with the minimum expenditure of staff time, staff decided to train four students to become peer facilitators. This allowed two groups to run simultaneously, each with two peer co-facilitators and one staff member taking a much less active role. We agreed to meet with peer facilitators weekly after the groups met to discuss how the groups were progressing and provide support and feedback to the new facilitators.

All group members were informed that this would be different from the first group in that it would be led by peers. This allowed the student facilitators the flexibility of choosing closing exercises. Peer facilitators also chose to have an opening "check-in." These opening and closing activities allowed each group to build its own identity, establishing its own group culture. Although the advisors played a less active role, they still performed activities such as taking attendance, handling any disciplinary issues, and keeping and distributing materials. We did this to lessen the chance of the peer facilitators being asked for favors or harassed outside of the group or in their housing units.

One year later, as we approach the beginning of our fourth Struggles Group and our first "advanced" Struggles Group (for those who had completed one group and wished to continue), we believe the group has been a success. All of the groups have had excellent attendance, which is unusual for most of the classes at the school. There has been a waiting list for each new group, with more students interested in attending than we can accommodate. The evaluations that group members are asked to complete at the end of each group have been overwhelmingly positive. We decided to offer an advanced group as a direct result of many of the members wishing to continue their healing process. We have also had several women interested in playing leadership roles and becoming peer facilitators. Many of the women have also evidenced increased self-confidence and self-esteem.

This work has also made a positive impact academically. Teachers have reported increased confidence in oral reading, more willingness to share written work with others, and improvement in written work.

Here are some of the pieces that students wrote:

> **I remember a time when...**
> *I remember a time when I finally fought back to protect myself while my mother was beating me. I was twenty years old and the mother of two, but still the victim of my mother's unhappiness. As children we're taught to respect and obey our parents. Usually I cowered with my hands up protecting my face and head. A reaction that I'm sure is a defense mechanism of survival. I didn't hit my mother, but my physically defensive behavior of pushing her away from me shocked her back into reality. The beatings finally stopped, and I was left with the question as to why I hadn't reacted to her actions years earlier. Then again, respect for your parents and the physical abuse from them are a hard combination to explain to a child.*
>
> **If I could I would...**
> *If I could I would shatter the cycle of abuse, so not one more child, woman or man needs to live in fear. Physical abuse breaks bones, but emotional abuse breaks your soul.*
>
> **Some ideas are too dangerous...**
> *Some ideas are too dangerous because they put me at risk that someone will know my deep dark past, if I have to admit some notion about myself that no one can see now because of the many layers of faces. They may think or look at me so differently. It could do some harm to my self-esteem.*
>
> **I remember a time when...**
> *I remember a time when I called the police, they did not respond to my call. An hour and a half later I called 911. The escalation of tensions I wanted them to help avoid had happened. Now a crime was committed. In court they said they should have responded, they heard the desperation in my voice.*
>
> **I hoped you wouldn't hurt me...**
> *I hoped you wouldn't hurt me, but I know that I was wrong. I could see the signs in the beginning but I shrugged them off. I thought it would get better, now I know it wasn't right to think that I could change you. The hope that I had was that I could do you some good. Now I see what I didn't see. I couldn't help myself. I hoped you wouldn't hurt me but I knew that I was wrong, but now I see it differently, it wasn't me it was you. Now I hope you find peace the way I have. The hurting is gone. I had hoped you didn't hurt me but through that hurt I've learned I don't have to change anyone else. The change lies within me, and I am in the hands of God.*

When students were asked to evaluate the Struggles group, this is what they wrote:

> *Writing helps me to bring out what was inside.*
>
> *What I got most out of this writing experience was enlightenment on past experiences I had with violence, and how it has affected my ability to deal with today. It brought out my true inner feelings on how violence has affected me and the people I care about.*
>
> *Writing about violence has given me the chance to talk about my family's darkest secrets. It allowed me to get over my fears. As a child growing up I was not allowed to tell anyone that I was being abused mentally and physically. I didn't like opening up to others. I now am able to open up a little because I was able to share my family's darkest secrets. This group has helped me a lot.*
>
> *I find I write honestly and trusting, I am more reserved when I speak, because of the shyness and the low self-esteem.*
>
> *Writing about violence has helped me to be aware of the different types of violent situations that I have encountered. It has helped me to become aware of my triggers as well as others' triggers. And it has helped me to avoid violence.*
>
> *When you write about your issues you tend to get more information out. You can express yourself on paper and not be worried whether it is going to hurt you or be used against you. You feel safe with paper. I can express myself fully on paper and not be questioned about how I feel, why I feel that way, and what happened to make me feel that way.*
>
> *The poems helped us bring out the things that we didn't realize happened to us in the present and the past.*
>
> *It has made me want to write more than I ever did before.*

(See the Resources section page 166 for some of the poems the group used.)

Genesis Center

Gloria Caprio, Nancy Fritz, Bernice Morris, Michele Rajotte

The Women's Support and Quilting Group

> *One of the students said that she had learned something new. She accomplished something and she felt great about it. Nothing else we could do at Genesis would give her the same feeling. Being part of this group of women was very empowering to all of them, and to us, too.* **(Bernice)**
>
> Have you ever made a quilt? I have. It's one of the most therapeutic and calming things I've ever done. And I had a huge sense of accomplishment when I finished. (Reba McEntire: *Comfort From A Country Quilt*[1])

The Women's Support and Quilting group consisted of mostly Spanish speakers, but there were also women from Vietnam, Korea, Laos, and Japan. Although the three Southeast Asian women could communicate in English and wanted to practice English conversation, some Spanish speakers were at the beginning level of learning. Gloria, the quilting teacher, is bilingual and was willing to translate the conversations for them.

In addition to the quilting classes, we held conferences, a self-defence workshop, yoga and anger management classes, and field trips. The culminating activity for the class was entering our large quilt in the "Annual Quilt Show" at the South County Museum in Narragansett, Rhode Island.

One of our field trips was to a multicultural quilt collection called "The Amistad Friendship Quilt Project," which was on display in Mystic, Connecticut, as part of an Amistad exhibit. The themes of the 21 quilts from around the world were ethnic heritage, cultural diversity, and human rights. The quilts were dynamic, brilliant, and daring. They could have inspired anyone to pick up a needle and thread.

Not only did the quilt exhibit offer a new vision, but other areas of Mystic Seaport also allowed the learners to experience life outside Providence. The lives of most of the learners revolve around their families and their communities. In Mystic, they went aboard old whaling ships and walked through an old house that resembled a pioneer home from 1830. There was a large quilting table in the front room where, the guide explained, weekly quilting bees were held.

We decided to use our grant money to purchase a sewing machine for Genesis. On more than one occasion, Gloria carried her sewing machine from her home into the classroom. Our own machine would give future learners the opportunity to make quilts, but also to make clothing for their children or drapery for their homes. This would be part of the women's cozy room that had been on our minds. After purchasing a sewing machine, Gloria began lessons for the learners, and the experienced sewers started planning new projects.

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[1] McEntire, Reba. *Comfort From a Country Quilt: Finding New Inspiration and Strength from Old-Fashioned Values.* New York: Bantam Books, 1999.

Gloria teaching a student quilting

Our final field trip was special. We wanted to go somewhere beautiful and serene where we could enjoy lunch together with no stress. We chose to spend the day in Newport, by the sea. We rented a van and drove to the ocean. The sky was a deep blue, and the water a Caribbean green. We flew kites and collected stones and shells. We compared notes on the beaches in our various countries and felt the warm spring air on our faces. Our class had found that comfortable, safe place together. We drove to a restaurant for lunch, and we talked about men, quilting, school, and children, and we laughed out loud. Everyone was happy for that day.

The Genesis Center quilting class presented their collection three days before graduation. We decorated the room and provided refreshments. Learners and staff arrived and the room filled with oohs and ahhs. This audience admired the creativity of the quilters. The learners talked about their learning experiences and the close friendships they had formed over the year.

The learners' first quilt was accepted at the South County Museum's 16th Annual Quilt Show and hung alongside 149 other quilts. We are proud of this accomplishment and hope to enter more next year. We are looking forward to having enough space at Genesis so that we can share our quilting, serenity, and strength with the community.

Women's Yoga

The learners at Genesis experience a high degree of stress in their daily lives and we felt that yoga would strengthen their ability to cope. Yoga combines meditation, breathing, and stretching. It incorporates the mind, body, and spirit to improve relaxation, enhance well-being, and improve our strength. Our worksite coordinator, Mary Scott, who had been doing yoga for over 20 years, was kind enough to offer her time and expertise by providing yoga classes for our learners. This form of exercise was new for many adults, but it was so popular that we plan to offer it more in the future.

Community Education Project

Maria Salgado

The Mujeres del Nuevo Almanecer (Women of the New Dawn) Group

The Community Education Project's learners are primarily Latinas and Latinos from the city of Holyoke, Massachusetts. Recruitment of learners for our WVAE group was done within our ESOL and Native Language Literacy classrooms; we also invited Latina women from other adult basic education programs in the city.

We developed a flyer that went to the different programs to advertise the group, which was described as a group for women who have been involved in an adult basic education program and are trying to improve their lives.

Week 1

After breakfast, which we had at every session, we discussed our purpose and established some guidelines for the group. The goals were to bring cohesion to the group and to avoid conflict during times of discussion. The guidelines for the group were repeated several times during the first few weeks, particularly for women who were participating for the first time.

Week 2

Journal writing was introduced as part of our learning. It was a tool used to help with hard sessions or to communicate feelings about discussions that may not have been easy. It was also used as a way to communicate to the facilitator a participant's feeling or thoughts about sessions or about the group.

Week 3

The group of learners was further engaged in the decision-making process about the group. Together with the facilitator they made decisions about who would make presentations and who to hire as a clinical support person. The first presenter they wanted was an educator who dealt with issues of violence. We invited a representative from the local domestic violence agency to come speak to the women.

Week 4

"*Conversaciones con mujeres*" (Conversations with women) was established this week. This was a 30 to 45 minute informal discussion over coffee and breakfast about a topic chosen by the group. The topic for this day was "machismo." Who is responsible for machismo in our community? Responses varied: the culture, referring to the Puerto Rican community; women; men; peer pressure; "society, which makes men feel that they have to be the head of household and they have to rule the women"; "mothers who raise their boys that way with that mentality"; "because men were made to be in the street and the women at home."

Week 5

The topic of the day during *Conversaciones* was "charter schools": Who do they benefit and will they take away money for the education of our children in the public schools? This conversation was brief since we didn't have someone to really answer the questions. A presenter was brought in later to address these questions.

The process for hiring a clinical support person began. We discussed the qualifications this person would need to benefit this group, and decided on the following:

Experience with victims of abuse

Experience working with Latina women of all ages

Understanding and sensitivity to low-income members of the community

Creativity and some type of artistic skill

Good listening skills

Week 6

Conversaciones topic of the day: poverty and Latina women. The following questions were explored: Why are Latina women amongst the poorest in the city? Why do we live in bad neighborhoods? Responses: Lack of skills, don't know English, not enough education for good jobs, child care costs too much money, lack transportation for work. The facilitator prompted the women to consider systemic issues such as Why do women of color lack education and good job opportunities? Is it really their fault? This was by far the longest *conversación* we had — it took up most of the morning — but it allowed us all to reflect and look at the bigger issues this society has in relation to women of color and the connection of these issues with violence.

Week 7

For the *Conversaciones* topic of the day we continued our discussion about poverty. It ended with some journal writing about feelings that we have about poverty.

We edited the written job description and began mailing out job descriptions to local agencies for posting.

Week 8

Conversaciones topic of the day: drug abuse. Why do people use drugs? What happens to a person when life becomes so difficult that they turn to drugs? This was a very candid discussion in which participants felt comfortable enough to share their stories about drugs. Some of the women didn't have direct experiences with drugs but had seen loved ones abuse drugs, and everyone had experienced the pain of seeing their lives affected by drug abuse.

We also reviewed resumes, contacted people interested in the clinical support position, and scheduled interviews for the following week. A list of questions was generated by the women for the interview process, and everyone left excited.

> At this point, the women are beginning to take ownership of the group. Indicators of that have been: the women come in early to help set up space; they come in with topics they've thought about during the week; they come with ideas for journal writing; they call each other to talk about the group; and they are more comfortable telling me the direction the group should go. (Note from facilitator's journal)

Week 9

Conversaciones topic of the day: police violence and the police department's lack of respect for the Latino community. The prejudices and the racism that the Latino community experiences with the Police are intense — in the eyes of many of us, it's a different type of violence. The women discussed the delayed response when Latina women call 911 for domestic violence situations. Teenagers in our community are consistently harassed by the police. That makes them angry, that anger cultivates violence in them, and then they go out and shoot or fight with others.

During the last hour of the group the women interviewed a clinical support candidate. After the interview they expressed how they felt about the interview process.

Week 10

The group interviewed two additional candidates, then we had a discussion about all the candidates and made a decision.

> The group decided on Cassie Roche, the candidate that seemed to have the most experience and gave them a sense of safety. The group was very impressed by Cassie's ability to look at each individual person in the eyes when answering a question. She also took time during the interview to ask the women about their reasons for participating. She demonstrated genuine compassion to all the participants of the group. (Note from facilitator's journal)

Week 11

This was our last meeting before the holiday season and the women wanted to listen to music and talk about the way they spent their holidays in their homelands. In their journals they wrote their wishes for the holidays and what they were looking forward to in the New Year.

The *Mujeres del Nuevo Almanecer* group was formed in October, met weekly through December, and took a break in January. When they started again in February, there were some attendance problems, but the sessions were extremely productive. Highlights included:

Presentation
Carmen Nieves's (of Womenshelter/Compañeras) "Domestic Violence 101"

Community Mapping
"Who are our allies? What do they do?" As a result of this activity (see page 64), the women agreed they wanted to give special recognition to those women in our community who have been extraordinarily helpful to other Latina women.

Support Wheel
"In times of crisis, who do we have to call on?" Many of the women remarked that even though they often feel isolated, they actually do have some type of support. Some mentioned that they found others in the group to be important supports.

Wishing Well
In this activity the women in the group had to make three wishes: a wish for themselves, a wish for a woman in their thoughts who they believed may be a victim of domestic violence, and a wish for the group of learners. This was a good activity for building group cohesion.

In the Same Boat
Women were asked to write down some obstacles they were facing. At the end of the activity many of the women realized that they were not alone in their struggle; many of them were in the same boat.

Intergenerational Activity
The differences in age allowed for an intergenerational collage. The women had to create a collage that reflected the role of a Latina woman. This activity also helped the women to feel comfortable with each other.

Conversaciones con Mujeres (CCM)/Conversations with Women
No matter what activity was done that week, CCM continued to be the favorite and the one believed to be the most educational of all. The honest and candid conversations that took place around the coffee table were the highlight of the day.

We struggled with many different barriers to women's participation over the course of the year, from logistical issues such as scheduling, finding a good meeting space, and weather cancellations, to discomfort about discussing family issues between two sisters-in-law in the group and, on an ongoing basis, the multiple issues group participants are facing in their lives.

> After today's meeting I realized that victims of trauma need consistency. However, the women that are survivors of domestic violence, particularly if they've been violated by a partner, tend to need flexibility. The last thing they need is to be told what to do. I realize that I have an agenda, but the women need to be given room to speak their mind. After all, no one ever allowed them to have a voice. But how do I balance this out when for the second week in a row we haven't been able to get to the planned activity because they had so much to say? (entry from Maria's journal)

Reflections

When Maria later spoke about the group, she reflected on some of the challenges of the work:

> *I was not really making the decisions, I wanted them to bite into it, feel a part of it. One of the things I discovered is that working with women and crisis is a really, really hard thing to do. Their daily mode is survival. Relying on them to do things for the group was difficult, because things would happen in their lives and tasks did not get done.*
>
> *My group experienced a lot of trauma in their lives, which was then reflected in the group, and that was difficult to work with. Thank God I have Cassie [the counselor] to help. I do not think I would have been able to continue doing the work if I did not have her to support me. We had everything in the group. One of the women's sons was shot in Puerto Rico. He was in a coma, so she had to take off. Most recently, one of the women's sons committed suicide in her apartment.*
>
> *We also went through this whole other kind of systemic violence. Every weekend this thing called "Operation Take Back our Streets" has given the right to the police department to do racial profiling. That has been brought to the group because mothers, daughters, partners, etc. have been stopped by the police. We had a youth in the community that was suspected by the police of having drugs on her and they beat her with a stick between her legs because they thought she had put the drugs in her crotch. That came to the group. So there was a lot of discussion about violence, and that was hard for me as a facilitator and as a member of this community. It was a challenge.* **(Maria)**

Domestic Violence Project

The Community Education Project also developed curriculum that dealt directly with issues of violence in women's lives. This project was carried out in the context of our Native Language Literacy course taught by Yolanda Robles. There were six learners in the class. Yolanda suggested that the group engage in a project to learn about violence against women, and the class members agreed. This was a big step for Yolanda, who had hesitated in the past to engage directly with a project around this theme.

After discussing and reading about domestic violence, the group decided to write a play based on the poem "Tengo flores hoy," which they later performed for the public. The classroom process for generating this project was fairly simple, involving the following major steps:

1. An initial, informal discussion about domestic violence based on participants' experiences, using these key questions:

   What is domestic violence?

   Who is exposed to domestic violence in our community?

   How can we know if we are victims of domestic violence?

2. A brief presentation by the teacher of some indicators of the presence of family violence in our lives and in our neighbors' lives, and the impact of violence on the community. (Basic materials, such as brochures and fact sheets, are available from any shelter, on the Web, etc. We recommend finding locally generated materials because they generally provide information about local resources.)
3. A writing assignment (paragraph/short essay) about domestic violence and potential solutions for dealing with it. Learners were free to choose the angle they wanted to take (e.g., personal experience, opinion).
4. A presentation by a community educator from Womanshelter/Compañeras on resources available in the community for addressing domestic violence.
5. Reading and discussion of the play *Tengo flores hoy.*
   (See Resources, page 155.)

These steps were spread out over two weeks of class. After Yolanda suggested the idea of writing a short play based on "Tengo flores hoy," each Thursday was spent developing the script for the play, then rehearsing and revising it until everyone was happy with the final product. Different students began to assume different roles in the play. The group also decided to include several Spanish-language songs related to the themes of family and relationship violence between segments of the play. One group member knew a local musician who agreed to provide guitar accompaniment to the various performers.

Project Hope

Char Caver and Anna Yangco

The Fireman Scholarship

The Adult Learners' Program at Project Hope received a flyer introducing the Fireman Scholars Project as an opportunity for our learners to continue their education. The Fireman Scholars Project provides grants for higher education, training, and apprenticeship programs to women with limited income. Scholars are chosen based on the following criteria: (1) academic and career goals that are clear and realistic; (2) proven academic success; (3) leadership potential; and (4) financial need.

Fireman Scholars receive leadership training and financial support to cover expenses such as tuition, books, childcare, transportation, and in some cases, even living expenses. The scholarship enables women to get the education they need to build a career and earn a living wage.

The Fireman Scholarship application consists of eight pages asking for personal data, referrals, and information about past employment. Applicants are also required to submit two letters of recommendation, a personal essay, copies of all relevant educational records, and income verification.

This invitation appeared to be a great opportunity for our learners; however, the women of the Adult Learners' Program were working towards their general education diploma (GED), and it was not likely that any would be completed by the application's due date.

To respond to the invitation appeared hopeless, but then we remembered one of Dr. Jenny Horsman's "key messages" from a recent training at Harvard University, which was that as educators we should support the student by believing that she can learn, that she can make change in her life, and that she is not hopeless. With this messages in mind, we extended the invitation to the women of the Adult Learners' Program to apply for the Fireman Scholarship.

The women were presented with this opportunity during their Loves Herself Regardless "self-empowerment" class. A video of the previous year's Fireman Scholars, entitled *Women of Promise*, was introduced to the class. In the documentary, Fireman Scholars from the previous year shared their stories of moving forward by furthering their education.

The women worked diligently on their application materials for a month. The application requires the women to state their educational, work, and volunteer history, identify their financial needs, and create a vision for their future. The women were led, as a group, to fill out basic information on the application line by line.

Initially, some women had difficulty articulating their aspirations because many felt hopeless about pursing their goals, perhaps as the result of earlier violence and trauma. They felt their choices were limited because of their economic status, family status, educational history, and lack of support.

Some of the basic information (e.g., name, address, phone number) was relatively simple for women to complete on their own. It was more difficult to fill out the section on their educational history. Many were questioning their ability to pass the GED. Most learners completely froze when they had to think about the future and were asked to list the college, apprenticeship, or training program and major program of study they were interested in pursuing. Many women had not considered where they would be in one year, much less what they would be doing in four years.

These questions revealed the limitations of many adult basic education programs:

- their limited understanding of violence and trauma and how these impact learners' self-esteem and potential, and
- the lack of resources, such as educational/vocational counseling.

Realizing these limitations highlighted our responsibility to connect our learners with an educational/vocational counselor and provide staff training on the issues of violence, trauma, and education.

Writing the Fireman Scholarship Essay

To apply for the Fireman Scholarship, all applicants must write an essay, two to four pages in length, describing

- why they want to be a Fireman Scholar;
- what supports they need to succeed academically;
- career goals;
- past or current leadership roles and activities;
- work experience and past educational experience;
- extra courses, seminars, workshops or trainings attended;
- volunteer work;
- participation in community organizations and/or religious activities; and
- awards they may have received.

As the women wrote their personal essays, visions and career goals seemed to grow, but stories of violence and trauma also emerged. For many of the women, this was their first acknowledgement of violence in their lives. There appeared to be something liberating and encouraging about this admission, which facilitated the process of moving forward, but there were still fears about all that "moving forward" entails.

Teachers and learners both became anxious during this process due to the intricacies of the application and the short notice of its due date.

Excerpt from adult learner's journal entry:

> I always wanted an education, and a few months ago I made up my mind to go back to school, get my GED, and further my education. All my life I was always told that I couldn't do many different things. I have been kept down for quite a while. I did not even know what was needed to have a complete essay.... Overall I am doing well, and I am very proud of myself.
>
> I've always wanted to be someone else instead of me because I was never the most confident person when it came to certain situations, but today I love me! I love being me!

Freewriting

Every Monday morning, to begin the Loves Herself Regardless class, the learners were guided through a freewriting exercise. To create a safe and comfortable atmosphere, the women were asked to sit quietly, breathe slowly and deeply, and relax. Music was played to engage the women in the writing process.

The students were asked to select an Angel Card or Virtue Card[1], read the word on it, and meditate on its meaning as it relates to their life and education.

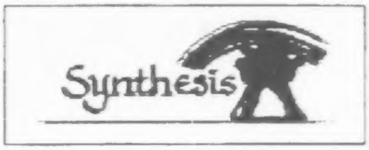
Then the students began to freewrite in their journals. The idea of this technique is to disregard the rules of grammar and writing and write from stream of consciousness. The goal is to connect the writer with what she feels and wants to express. Women were given the opportunity to share their journal entries with the class.

Over the course of this year, writing became a potent form of self-expression. Because of the lack of restrictions, freewriting allowed the women to express themselves freely and to learn about their own thoughts and feelings.

The process of sharing stories was a crucial step in the entire course of writing the Fireman Scholarship essay. Because they felt heard, this practice validated their experiences and motivated them to continue writing.

Here is the journal entry of one of the adult learners who participated in the Loves Herself Regardless class:

> WOW! This is cool, Char said we got the words for a reason and the word I got was synthesis. It means in a nutshell to put together and that is what I'm doing right now putting my life together. My daughter is in childcare, I'm back at school and it feels so good to get up in the morning and have a purpose again.



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[1] See Bibliography on Bringing the Whole Self to Learning page 188. You can pick Angel Cards online at www.innerlinks.com.

Phenomenal Women: A Book Produced by the Adult Learners Program

Phenomenal Women is a collection of personal essays by the women in the Adult Learners program at Project HOPE. Every year, the Adult Learners Program (ALP) is given a grant by the Massachusetts Department of Education to do a "special project." The women chose to produce a book of the group's writings from the past four years.

The women were asked to pick one or two essays from their assignments to contribute. Most of the learners chose the personal statements they had recently completed for the Fireman Scholarship application.

The learners modified their essays for the book. With the help of the staff and volunteers, the women edited their essays. They made decisions on which elements of their stories they wanted published in the book. The option to remain an anonymous author was given.

The editor also requested that ALP staff and volunteers contribute to the book. The topic and format of the entry was left up to the staff.

The students brought in pictures to include with their personal narratives, and women who did not have photographs could take pictures with the digital camera at Project Hope. Group photos were taken for the cover, and at the end of the school year the final product was bound. The 80 color copies were distributed to the women at graduation.

Educational/Vocational Counseling

Most of our students who are working toward or have completed the GED are underprepared for the college experience. Many chose a college or university because they heard it was a good school or they know someone who attends the college. Many do not have basic information about size, cost, how to arrange a campus visit, admission requirements, how to apply, application deadlines, and/or choosing a major/course of study.

Since most of our students will be "first generation" college students, they do not know whether a particular college or program is a "good fit" for them or not. We want to provide additional support services that will help them make informed decisions when applying and when completing their certificate or degree. We believe this information will increase their confidence and success. Without this knowledge, students may waste money and time and become discouraged. They may continue to think something is wrong with them instead of realizing they do not have enough information to succeed. Without these support services, they may find themselves in the same or worse predicament than before, thereby adding another layer of failure to their lives.

We believed there was a need for a program that would help learners with the transition between completing a GED and entering a higher educational/vocational institution. To fill this gap, we developed AWARE workshops. AWARE stands for "assess, work, affirm, recreate, empower." The goal of these multifaceted educational workshops is to support career and education planning, as well as teach violence awareness and reduction as it relates to learning.

The Fireman Scholars' site coordinator met with Dr. Adrienne Anderson, a counselor from Bunker Hill Community College, several times. They looked at ways in which educational counseling could take place within the Loves Herself Regardless group at Project Hope. Adrienne proposed workshops that would be conducted as part of the Women, Violence, and Adult Education project.

Members of the Project Hope Adult Learners' Program were asked to observe and evaluate these workshops. To continue staff development on this issue of violence and its effect on learning, we invited the other teachers to witness the process by which the students "set realistic short- and long-term educational goals, become aware of the many guises of violence — visible and invisible — and learn how to act assertively and proactively to confront and eliminate violence at school, home, and at work."

Graduation at Project Hope

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Student Reaction and Participation

Almost every day of the AWARE workshops the women maintained exceptional attendance, arrived in a timely fashion, and participated enthusiastically in the workshop.

> *I may get lost somewhere down the road, and all I have to do is take my educational plan out and see where I am going to go.*
>
> *I have learned how to see my most valuable tool: my mind.*
>
> *Today really helped to see where I am going.*
>
> *Today I will remember that only I can make things happen and only I can determine my own fate.*
>
> *Thank you all so very much for the awesome experiences you have shown me, as well as helping me to bring out the potentials that were hidden down inside me.*

Next Steps

Next Steps

We close this Source Book with the hope that the work has inspired you and that it will continue to evolve through your own efforts and those of the people you work with. If you do try out some of these ideas, or change something in your teaching or personal life as a result of reading this material, we would love to hear about what you have done.

Our dream is to find funding to further this work around violence and education with educators throughout North America. We hope that you will be part of that continuing process of deepening the analysis of violence and its effects on teaching and learning and passing on ideas for how to take on this work responsibly and respectfully. We will continue to give workshops and teacher trainings, and to develop support networks of educators both in person and online. You may be able to access workshops at conferences or through state or regional professional development support networks.

We have begun to reach other parts of the world: we have presented our work in England and South Africa and have contact with women interested in trauma and learning in India and Australia. We plan to develop a Web site, so watch for a link on the World Education site (www.worlded.org) or Jenny Horsman's site (www.jennyhorsman.com). We hope to have a listserv where teachers, researchers, counselors, and others who are experienced in the area of violence and education can lead discussions and share ideas about a range of topics, such as violence and learning disabilities and taking on issues of violence in correctional settings.

In these ways we will continue to build a "supportive community of educators" both by giving support in person and through creating virtual support networks on the Internet. We believe that the work of trauma and learning will be strengthened by this approach not only because more and more people and ideas can be included, but also because, as we discovered, building support for the work is the most essential aspect of actually doing the work.

In the Source Book you have read about the difficulties, the tensions, and the need to understand the complexity of violence, and you have read how both teachers and students have expanded their lives and embraced new areas of growth. As Maria and Yolanda, two teachers who worked at the Community Education Project, describe in their reflections below, taking on the challenge is well worth the hard work.

> *Now in the classroom I'm a different person. And now I can be an advocate for the women. When I hear another teacher complaining about a student, I say, "Have you ever asked if [the student] is going through something? Because that impacts on learning." Now I have a different mindset. I've made the connection, and I'm never going back. In my new job, I work as a transitional coordinator for teenage girls. I'll see a girl and say, "That girl is depressed as a result of violence." I've seen that there's a connection between counseling and teaching. I wasn't aware of this before. I will forever be more conscious of the issue as it affects women in the classroom. I will forever try to do similar things in groups wherever I work. I'll never teach the same way again.* **(Maria)**

> *I know I [took on issues of violence and learning] well because one of my students was in a violent relationship with her husband and she left. She is still studying and she is working for her GED. The power of people knowing they can be heard and knowing they can be understood [is what makes the difference].* **(Yolanda)**

Yolanda Robles and her grandaughter at a community presentation of "Tengo flores hoy"

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Resources

"But I'm Not a Therapist"
A Step by Step Description of the Collage Process
Tengo flores hoy
Examples of Poems Used by Programs
Sample Materials on "Violence in Public Space"
Bibliographies

Take on the Challenge

A Source Book from the Women, Violence, and Adult Education Project

-by Elizabeth Morrish, Jenny Horsman, and Judy Hofer

A project of World Education. Funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Women's Educational Equity Act (WEEA) Program.

This beautifully-produced **new resource** with photos and original artwork is primarily for adult literacy teachers, but will be useful for all educators and activists interested in anti-violence work. It is an analysis of the effects of violence and a practical collection of **ideas and activities**, with examples from teachers working in GED, native language literacy, ABE, ESOL, welfare-to-work, corrections, and homeless shelter settings. It shows how they successfully changed their curriculum and learning environment to address the **impact of violence on learning**. Based on the foundation of Jenny Horsman's research, practitioners focused on student activism and well-being incorporating counseling and creative arts – collage, quilting, movement, and meditation – into the classroom.

Each chapter includes a general introduction, tools for programs, and teachers writing about the changes they made.

Chapter One – Take on the Challenge explores our understanding of violence, its impacts on learning, and first steps that programs can take.

Chapter Two – Build a Web of Support describes how establishing program and community support and taking care of yourself are key to doing this work.

Chapter Three – Reform Programming examines possibilities for changing curricula and creating conditions for learning with detailed descriptions from each teacher.

WORLD EDUCATION

For order information, please contact Sabrina Kurtz-Rossi at:
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